THE SILVER THORN

The CATHEDRAL *Edition*

The Works of

HUGH WALPOLE

The Silver Thorn

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IN MEMORIAM

ROBERT MURRAY GILCHRIST

FINE FRIEND AND FINE ARTIST

The Silver Thorn was the Consolation Prize. It was the best prize of all—but that was because he liked best the one who lost the race.

"THE DUCHESS OF PARADIS"

Hans Frost.

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THE LITTLE DONKEYS WITH THE CRIMSON SADDLES

THE little donkeys went past the shop window at eight in the morning and seven-thirty in the evening, punctually, rain or shine.

Miss Pope christened them Percy and Emily. The old man whose donkeys they were she had long ago named Voltaire because he looked wicked, un-Christian and clever —and because she liked literary allusions. One thing she often discussed with Miss Menzies, and that was why, being wicked and clever, he had not advanced further in the world. Miss Menzies suggested drink, and Miss Pope thought it probable.

On the other hand, were it drink he would for sure beat and abuse Percy and Emily, and this he did quite plainly not do, because they were both plump and well cared for. It might be, suggested Miss Menzies, that he kept them in good condition to benefit his business. No one cared to ride skeletons. Miss Pope, who was very thin herself, said that stoutness did no one any good, and Miss Menzies, who was plump like the donkeys, replied that it was greatly a matter of God's will, although, as Miss Pope knew, she had no very good opinion of the Deity and often enough spoke of Him sarcastically.

Percy, Emily, Voltaire, Miss Pope, Miss Menzies, all lived in Silverton-on-Sea. "When you say lived," Miss Menzies would sometimes impetuously exclaim, "you are

putting it altogether too high—exist is about the word!"

Miss Pope and Miss Menzies had existed together in Silverton for over ten years now. They kept a shop of fancy work and antiquities. The fancy work was very new, the antiquities very old. The shop, when it was lucky, made a profit, and then they went away for a holiday. They had been to the Lake District, Paris, Vevey, the Isle of Man, and Lake Como. On the other years the shop had not made a profit.

Miss Pope was forty-three years of age, tall, bony, a jutting chin, kind, friendly eyes, reserved, sensitive. She loved Miss Menzies.

Miss Menzies was thirty, round, plump, short, dark pretty hair, also kind, friendly eyes, not at all sensitive, and she loved Miss Pope. But she loved Miss Pope less than Miss Pope loved Miss Menzies.

She was—outwardly, at least—more romantic and sentimental than Miss Pope. She thought often of men. Miss Pope never thought of them at all. Miss Menzies had no doubt but that very shortly she would be married. She had thought this now for fourteen years. She had been once engaged. Ten years ago. That had been to a young man in the war, just after she had joined Miss Pope, but the young man had flirted with other girls. "Only his fun," he had assured her. "Yes, but not mine," she had replied. She had a hot temper when roused.

Miss Menzies was the lively one. Miss Pope did the business. Miss Menzies was charming in the shop and sold many an article that the purchaser did not wish to buy. When she was gay, she was very gay. Her bad moods never lasted for long. Sometimes she would be deeply depressed. Was this to go on forever and ever? Of course,

she loved Miss Pope, but this stupid old town, this stupid old shop, this stupid unnatural life. After all, a woman was *meant* to be married. Not every woman, said Miss Pope.

Although, however, Miss Menzies was very gay with men, went to the local dances, smiled and laughed and delighted in compliments, she had a certain deep fastidiousness—just anyone would not do. With everyone there was something the matter.

The life was certainly monotonous. They lived in a little apartment above the shop. This apartment had four rooms: a sitting room, a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. The rooms were tiny, but arranged with great taste. Miss Menzies loved possessions and cared deeply for the little Chippendale (half-Chippendale) bureau, the old gilt mirror, some prints from Ackermann's *Microcosm*, and the old French clock that had belonged to Miss Pope's grandfather. Miss Pope cared for these things, too, but chiefly because Miss Menzies cared for them.

The greatest fun that they had was when they went on buying expeditions. They went to London, Canterbury, Winchester, any number of places. They had a little Morris-Oxford which they called after Miss Menzies's silly uncle, Fortescue.

The position of their shop was very agreeable. It possessed a charming Jane-Austenish bow window and looked onto the cobbled path that turned down to the sea. From the side windows the sea, in all its glories, its sulks, its rages, and its "comedies" was splendidly visible. In front of the bow window were the path, a small green common, and the house of a retired lieutenant colonel. Outside the shop hung a sign with a picture, beautifully painted, of an Eighteenth Century street. Over the door

was painted in large blue letters: "THE SERENDIPITY SHOP." No one knew what this meant, but it was out of Horace Walpole's letters. A very superior London bookseller who dealt only in ancient and priceless editions had called his shop by this name.

In the bow window were arranged many enchanting things: brass candlesticks, fire screens, pewter mugs, brightly coloured samplers, a silver ship, old paste brooches, necklaces, and pins. Miss Menzies loved some of these things so much that it was an agony for her to sell them. For the silver ship indeed she asked so impossible a price that it was still gloriously with her.

Miss Pope and Miss Menzies never quarrelled, because Miss Pope refused to hear of such a thing. At times Miss Menzies would indignantly exclaim that Miss Pope had no feelings, but in her heart she knew that the opposite of this was true. Miss Pope's feelings were so deep that no trivial dispute was allowed to touch them.

There were occasions when Miss Menzies wished passionately that Miss Pope didn't love her with such strength and obstinacy. It seemed that nothing could shake Miss Pope's love for her, which made that love an occasion both unexciting and frightening. Miss Menzies felt that she wasn't worthy of it.

That she wasn't worthy of it was no fault of her own. Jane Pope had put all of her force into this one affection, while Alice Menzies allowed hers to spread out over a thousand things—over the silver ship, the Chippendale bureau, the Sealyham puppy next door, the curl of the sea as, on a fine morning, beyond the side window, it slipped back from the shining road, the kindliness of Mrs. Masham the fruiterer, the jolly twin of young Mr. Hexton, with

whom she often danced, the touching loneliness and devotion to duty of the two little donkeys—these and many, many other things drew from Alice little impulses of love and tenderness. What she needed was to meet someone who would draw out of her all this love and tenderness to one aim and object, only, unlike Jane Pope, this someone must be a man.

She thought that, after all these years, possibly at last this man had arrived, Mr. Hunting, Mr. Maurice Hunting.

It was twenty minutes past seven of a fine summer morning, and she was standing at the bow window—waiting for the donkeys to pass. Breakfast and the donkeys synchronized. Half-past seven the year round. They would maybe have had their breakfast at eight in winter time had it not been for the donkeys, but because the donkeys did not relax they must not.

Although really, when you thought of it, seven-thirty in the morning was ridiculously early for donkeys in the winter time. No clients would appear before ten. And how few in the winter in any case there must be!

Miss Menzies walked sometimes to the long strip of smooth sand over whose shiny surface Percy and Emily carried their little charges, and on cold, wet days they would look desolate enough—standing bravely there on duty, with their faded crimson saddles, and Old Voltaire, crooked and bent and wicked, staring malevolently out to sea.

No one in the world behaved more finely, more patiently, more decently than Percy and Emily with their soft sad eyes, their faint brown coats, their stubborn ears.

Now, how was Miss Menzies going to behave?

She stood there at the window seeing all the colour,

the faint blue sky like a bird's wing, the clear, sparkling grass of the little green, the poplars over to the right of the colonel's house swaying musically in the morning breeze, and, through the open window, the hush-hush, the stir-stir of the gentle morning sea.

How was she going to behave? Last Tuesday Mr. Hunting had asked her to marry him. To-day she was to give him her answer.

She had said no word as yet to Jane Pope.

Of course she would accept him. There could be no possible doubt. She would have accepted him last Tuesday had not some strange unreasoning caution warned her to wait just for a day or two. He was physically most attractive—the type that she preferred. Not too young (he had told her that he was six-and-thirty), thick-set, broad and strong, his colour red-brown with health, hair and short toothbrush moustache black, not stout as yet (although he must take care of that), most neat and cleanly in appearance, by profession a doctor with a good practice in Bristol.

He was, he told her, no longer a boy. He wanted a wife who would be a companion, a friend, who would help him in his work—and yet even as he spoke these quite assured words his voice had trembled, he had taken her hand and pressed it quite freely—there was a light in his dark eyes that seemed to speak of something more than a mere desire for companionship. He had fine tastes, too, read the novels of Mr. Galsworthy and the works of Mr. Lytton Strachey, admired the paintings of Sargent, and was a subscriber to the Bristol concerts. He was also a man who played golf—could sail a boat, loved dogs, enjoyed watching Rugby football.

A many-sided man. He had thought too about life, considered that wars were shameful and must be stopped, was a patriot, too, and thought Bolshevism an infernal crime, did not go to church, but yet had religious feelings.

Of course, she would marry him. He was the very man for whom she had for so long been waiting. And yet, was she truly in love? Why, at this moment, as she looked out onto the shining grass and heard the rustle of the sea, was she not longing to be caught into his arms; why was it rather of Jane Pope that she was thinking and of all the little things—the little things that had seemed to her for so long to be tiresome, intolerable hindrances binding her to slavery? Why——

Ah! There were the donkeys!

They turned the corner, as they always did, at a little trot. Then, when they came to the stretch of flat with the gleaming green on their right they made a movement in the direction towards it, and then Voltaire, as he always did, switched them back to their proper place.

They paused opposite the bow window before resigning themselves to their inevitable duty.

Their crimson saddles—faded long ago with the wind and the rain—gave them their unusual note. Once those saddles must have been grand indeed with their splendid rich colour; even now there was colour enough to place them in a class by themselves. No other donkeys anywhere had saddles like these.

Miss Menzies leaned out of the window and waved to them. Percy and Emily looked neither to the right nor to the left; patiently, with childish dignity, they stared down the road.

Then, after a switch of Voltaire's little stick, on they trotted again.

"Breakfast ready!" cried Miss Pope from the room above. Miss Menzies, sighing, turned away from the window. The moment had arrived. She must deal with it as honestly as she could.

The little sitting room was very gay in the morning sun, the Ackermann prints smiled behind their glass, the sampler on the wall with its purple flowers and its "Jane Bowl made this" in amber letters, everything welcomed Alice Menzies when indeed she did not want to be welcomed at all, but sat down like a condemned prisoner to her herring.

And Jane Pope at once knew. When you love anyone as deeply as she loved Alice Menzies you know everything.

"What's the matter, Alice?" she asked in her sharp, kind, and rather masculine voice.

"You know Mr. Hunting——" began Alice Menzies.

"Yes," said Jane Pope, who had met him once.

"He asked me to marry him last Tuesday. To-day I'm to give him my answer."

"Well?"

"Of course, I'm going to accept him."

Jane Pope put down her cup. Alice knew she was trembling; she knew it although she did not look at her. She did not dare to look at her.

But Jane Pope's voice was quite firm when she said:

"I'm very glad, darling. It's what I've been wanting for you."

Then, after another pause, she got up, went over to Alice Menzies's chair, bent over, and kissed her. Alice

put up her hand and touched Jane Pope's cheek. They stayed for a moment thus.

Then Jane Pope, moving back to her seat again, said:

"I expect that American woman will be in this morning after those two chairs. She's got bargains there."

"She has indeed," said Alice Menzies. And that was every word that they exchanged on the matter.

Should not one be happy when one is going to fulfil the desire of one's heart? The sun is shining, the waters are rolling white-capped on the shore, the skylark is singing above the cornfield, the air is warm with summer scents, it is the day after the heart of all the poets from Syracusan Theocritus to Mr. Wordsworth of Grasmere. In the hollow of the cliff—high over the shore glittering now mother-of-pearl behind the retreating tide, cornfields behind him and wine-purple sea in front of him, Mr. Hunting, passion in his heart and a ring (charming, in excellent taste, three little pearls and a thin gold band) in his pocket, is waiting. Below him are bathing tents, maidenly in a row like early Victorian ladies; to the left of him along the broad stretch of sand Percy and Emily (their crimson saddles invisible from this distance) are trotting under their infant burdens; above him the cornfields like burnt sugar, everywhere happiness and life and colour. Only Miss Menzies advancing in a dress of pink and white.

He had no doubt of what the answer would be. He was well satisfied (a state not uncustomary for him). This was all that he needed, a lady, pretty, cultivated, with good taste, to manage his house, charm his friends, assist the growth of his practice, share his bed, and bear him two

children. Two. A boy and a girl. Percy, after his uncle who, when he died, would leave him money; Emily, after his aunt who had left him some money already. He would take that house towards Clifton, the house with the veranda and the garage near the gate. He would——

Alice, as she sat down beside him, wished (oh, how she wished!) that he had not chosen just this spot in which to make his proposal. Had she thought of it (but when *does* one think of these things?) there could not possibly be anywhere worse—here where she could see all the familiar things—the little town white and shining in the sun, huddled together so happily as though cosily inviting her congratulation (she so old a friend) at its contentment, the great sweep of purple, green-striped sea, the silver beach, the cornfields, and the singing larks. Yes—and then, surely she could see them quite clearly, Percy and Emily trotting bravely, little midgets of patience and determination, to their inevitable destiny.

She had hated all these things. She had regarded them as tyrants holding her to sterility, old-maidhood, failure, and negation. But how different they seemed now that she was about to leave them! And the shadow of Jane, Jane's nobility and kindliness and love, the touch of her cheek, the unselfish fidelity of her soul, Jane's shadow hung over all the scene.

Turning to Mr. Hunting, she was forced to confess that he was noble too. Sitting forward, staring at the sea, square and strong, and so very masculine, he seemed indeed a rock—not a rock of Jane's less romantic kind—a masculine rock with all the masculine allure. His voice, too, was extremely firm and decided.

"Alice," he said, "I thought you were never coming.

I didn't know how I was going to wait. It has been cruel of you to keep me so long in doubt."

He took her hand in his. She expected her heart to bound with excitement and joy. It did not. But that was because her eye had been caught by the shining spire of St. John's Church. St. John's, where indeed she very seldom went, whose bells, however, seemed to belong to her, to be hers by right of every tiny happening of the last ten years.

"I hope—I mean——" she hesitated. "I've been thinking a great deal of what you said. It was kind of you to give me a day or two——"

"That was only fair. You wanted a little time, and so I gave it you. If you had been my patient and you'd wanted a day or two to consider whether you'd have an operation or no, I'd give you time. Of course I would. This is a sort of operation, you know."

He laughed in a very jolly human way, but she knew at once that her sense of humour was not his. She would never laugh at the things that he would laugh at—or was it that her eye now had travelled to the cluster of red house roofs that sheltered, as she so thoroughly knew, the market-place? The market-place where on Fridays all the farmers, the dogs, the sheep——

"Well, darling," his firm voice reminded her, "I want my answer." Gently (but very firmly) he put his arm round her and drew her close to him. She could smell the stuff of his coat and the scent of a rather strong tobacco. His heart was beating with steady beats. His body, as she realized her contact with it, seemed to be made of iron.

"I want," she said in a small faltering voice (and her eye now had caught the flag that always flew so bravely in the season from the tower of the little building—the

Plaza it was called—where the concerts, the dances, the lectures were held), "to try and explain."

"To explain?" His hand tightened on hers. "Why, of course; explain away!"

"You see"—and the flag on the Plaza seemed to be waving quite especially in her direction—"I'm not a child any longer. It isn't as though either of us were children."

"Quite," he said, encouraging her.

(The flag above the Plaza seemed to tell her that he had said "Quite" a great many times the other day.)

"And one knows more about life than one did when one was very young, and so one's more cautious of making a change."

"Quite."

"And one's got fixed into a sort of groove, hard to get out of——"

"Quite," he said, as she paused.

"What I mean is that I'm not sure even now, after your so kindly giving me these days to think it over, whether I really love you enough——"

"Of course you do," he answered, laughing the laugh of victory. "Don't you think I could tell that the first moment we met?"

"Oh, but I don't think I did love you the first moment we met! Really, you're a little wrong there. Of course, I liked you, but liking is very different from love, isn't it?"

"Quite," he assured her.

Yes, it *was* different. She knew it as her eyes moved down the line of roofs, all sparkling now like lumps of quartz in the sun, down to the lower, irregular circle of chimneys and windows that covered just the ground where for ten years herself and Jane Pope had been living.

She knew, with a sudden passionate burst of revelation, that she loved that ground; that there, exactly there where gathered together were the chimney pots, the bow windows, tables and chairs, pots and pans, dresses hanging on hooks, rows of shoes in cupboard, squares of green grass, thousands and thousands of pebbles, fires and streamers of smoke, eggs on the boil and books behind glass, white-enamelled baths and the Ackermann prints—just there, with their confused collection of oddities, her heart was stirred and moved as—oh, most certainly not!—it was *not* stirred and moved by Mr. Hunting.

In her distress she turned towards him, and at once Silverton, the beach, the fields, the sea, the sky were excluded, and instead there was Mr. Hunting filling all the horizon. Mr. Hunting, so close that she could see the red veins of his cheeks, the short, sharp bristles of his moustache.

As she turned to him he caught her to him and kissed her.

"There," he said, "that settles it!"

Had he but kissed her and said nothing about it, it might have been done. She liked the kisses (if truth be told) extremely. But the words offended her liberty.

"Oh, no, no," she cried; "it hasn't!"

And her heart cried out to the shining roofs, to the gleaming beach, to the white-capped sea to come and defend her! In a moment she was going to yield. His physical presence was too eliminating. She wanted to be loved by a man, to fling aside her old-maidhood forever, to be as other women, full of life's experience, and a living, consciously completed woman. But, oh, she didn't want to marry Mr. Hunting, to exchange Mr. Hunting for Jane,

to suffer his masculine cocksureness, his arrogance, his lack of imagination, to exchange Bristol and his dull doctor's house, the monotonous routine of his uninteresting friends, his male self-satisfaction, for Jane's beauty of heart, her lovely imagination, for the silver ship, the little things of the shop and the flat, the friends, the beloved little town with its crooked streets, its intimate shops, its salty air, its shining reaches of sand and sea. Oh, no! Oh, no!

But she was yielding. Mr. Hunting now had caught her very close to himself. He had kissed her again and yet again, and now he was telling her all about himself—all about his childhood, how he had been considered always the promising one of the family, how his mother had always said that he would go far, and his Uncle Percy, who was also a doctor——

"Percy," thought Alice Menzies, and her soul for an instant escaped the snarer, her eyes fled outwards, downwards. She saw the sand, now blazing under the sun, and there, brave little heroes—there they were, trotting for their very lives, Voltaire, a black doll, running at their sides.

"His" Uncle Percy, seeing his ability, had promised to help him. So, indeed, he'd gone from strength to strength; done well at Bart's (he'd played half-back for the hospital football team), stayed on there as surgeon, then found a small practice in Lambeth. Been there a year or two when his Aunt Emily—("Emily," cried Alice Menzies's soul, and once more she escaped. Now her eyes were fixed on that broad stretch of sand and she could see how her little friends had come to the end of their journey there; far, far little black toys in the glittering sun)—his aunt Emily,

admiring him as she did, had helped him with money, and he had bought the practice at Bristol. Here had he gone from strength to strength. He might be said, without undue vanity, he hoped, to be now the most promising doctor in Bristol.

People were coming to him from all sides. Why, only last week—here he apologized lest he should seem to be boasting. He kissed her again. Her soul was caught again. She wanted to be kissed. She wanted to be loved.

And so, he assured her, she would have a wonderful time. He would buy this splendid house with ten bedrooms, garden, garage, and tennis court. There she should entertain his friends. He knew all the best people in Bristol.

And then—he caught her yet closer to himself—he knew that she would want children. She was that kind of woman. He couldn't love a woman who didn't want children. Two, he thought, would be a nice number. Not more than two in these days when living was so costly. A boy and a girl would be splendid, if they only had the luck——

(She was sinking, sinking. Her heart was beating against his. Her hair brushed his cheek.)

A boy and a girl. And he thought, if they were so fortunate, that it would be jolly to call them Emily, after the aunt who had been already good, and Percy, after the uncle who shortly (because he was now seventy-two and had a weak heart) would be.

Percy and Emily! Her heart pounded! She was seized with a hysterical passion of laughter. Percy and Emily! She was out of his arms and, standing there, looking down to the sea, cried:

"Oh, no! Don't you see? The ridiculous coincidence!

Oh, it's too funny! It's terribly funny! Percy and Emily! But those are the names of the donkeys. The donkeys—Jane and I have always called them so. And our children—yours and mine. What a silly coincidence! Oh, I'm so sorry! Forgive me!"

For she saw, in the very middle of her laughter, that he was offended, terribly offended.

"Donkeys! Donkeys! Our children!" he repeated, staring at her as though she had gone suddenly mad.

"Yes, I know." Her breath was coming in little gasps. "It's the coincidence. There never was anything so absurd. I can never explain, and if I did you'd never see it. It's only that there are two donkeys—two dear little donkeys."

"Two dear little donkeys!" he exclaimed. "Forgive me if I don't see the joke. I was speaking to you more seriously than I've ever spoken to anyone in my life, speaking of the most serious things a man and woman can speak of, and——"

"Oh, I know!" She couldn't now at all control herself. "I know how shocking it is. I'm ashamed. I can't stop. It's so silly. Our children—you're so solemn about them—and then, Percy and Emily running about down there."

He was growing angry. She saw, in a flash, that he would be angry whenever his vanity was hurt.

"Please explain; I'm sorry if I am slow. I was talking about our children. That seems a joke to you. I don't understand."

"Oh, no, it isn't a joke. Of course they aren't a joke." She was struggling to control herself. "It's because for ever so long Jane and I have watched two donkeys pass our window and *their* names are Percy and Emily."

She paused for breath.

"Really, Miss Menzies!" Yes, now he was deeply insulted. "I think you don't understand me. I've always imagined a proposal of marriage was a serious affair, something——"

"Oh, it is, it is! Terribly serious. But that's the worst of life. Ridiculous things are always breaking in, and if people don't see the same ridiculous things, think the same ridiculous things, they oughtn't to marry. I know they oughtn't."

"But, forgive me—how can I see what's ridiculous if you won't tell me?"

"No, but you'd never see. And Jane always sees. She loves the donkeys just as I do."

"But *what* donkeys?" Yes, now he was most justly in a rage. "What have these donkeys, wherever they are, to do with our marriage?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I apologize. Terribly. It was the coincidence. That our children should have the same *names* as your uncle and your aunt and those names the same as the donkeys'. Life's so funny. We're so absurd, and if you don't see how absurd we are it wouldn't do for us to marry. Really it wouldn't!—I'm sorry," she went on, with a pang of misgiving. "I've behaved abominably. You can't forgive me, and you're right."

She came to him, bent forward, and gently kissed his forehead.

"You've been very good to me. You've paid me a great compliment. But it would never, never do."

And, turning, she left him.

At first she scarcely knew the way she went. Then everything stole out and around her, the green slope of the

hill over whose breast the late afternoon shadows were now falling, the thick, dark coolness of the oaks, the bright colour of the path that led down to the town, the great sweeps of purple shadow that now lay like islands upon the breast of the violet sea; above all, the sky that glittered with light and into whose great field of faintly rose pearl a piled-up cumulus of ivory cloud was now mounting.

She slipped into the little house. The green shutters had been put up over the bow window.

She ran straight up to the sitting room. The lamp with the ivory parchment shade was lit. The table was spread for supper. The French clock struck the quarter.

Jane Pope, who was standing at the window, turned.

Alice, waiting at the door, cried:

"Jane, I've refused him!"

"No, no, no!"

"Yes, yes, yes! It never would have done. He had no sense of humour. He suggested—Jane, just think of it!—that our children, when we had them, should be called Percy and Emily."

"Percy and——"

"Yes. He did n't know, of course, about our Percy and Emily. How should he? But I laughed, and he was offended, and—there you are! Oh, it never would have done!"

And everything in the room repeated: "It never, never would have done!"

She ran to Jane Pope, clung to her.

"Oh, Jane, I didn't know. I had never guessed—how good, how sweet all this time you have been."

So Jane, who had waited for many years, most patiently, had her great moment.

They stood at the open window looking out. The sea

lay milky white, like the smoky glass of a mirror. The sun, very low, lit the green on the other side of the path with a fierce flame. Everything was as still and as gently coloured as a bed of crocuses.

Suddenly there was a jingle.

"Oh, the donkeys!" cried Alice. "They are before their time!"

Round the corner they came. Under the window, as usual, they stopped. Then, attracted perhaps by the light of the lamp that was pale against the evening sun, Percy looked up.

For an instant his patient, friendly eyes gazed into theirs. Then, with a twitch of his ear he had turned with Emily hopefully towards the grass.

Once again, as on a thousand earlier days, they were disappointed, and, bending their heads in submission, trotted away round the corner towards home.

THE TIGER

LITTLE Homer Brown had one night, after too luxuruious a supper, a nasty dream. He dreamed that he was in a jungle. He was lost in a thick dark mass of bush that seemed to rise like a forest with green spikes on every side of him. He walked with naked feet on pointed grass sharp as razor blades, and then he saw shining at him out of the dark mass two burning eyes. Petrified with something more than terror, as one is in dreams, he stood there waiting for the tiger to spring. As the tiger sprang he woke up.

The only thing about this dream was that in the morning he remembered it. He never remembered his dreams, which was a pity, because they were in general pleasant ones, and he had not much romance in his actual waking life. It seemed that he forgot the pleasant ones and remembered the nightmares, which was perhaps characteristic of him because he was of the sort that worries over little troubles and forgets too quickly the larger delights.

He remembered his tiger for three days at least. He told his sister, who kept house for him, and several of his more intimate friends about it. They wisely cautioned him against eating steak just before going to bed. The trouble with him was, as he thought about it, that he was convinced in his heart that there was more in the tiger than steak. He had all his life been afraid of the future, that something would spring out at him one day and eat him up. He was

a man small of stature, sentimental of nature, and likely to catch colds. But, like many another Englishman, he was brave enough before the things which he could see. He had so little imagination in general that the things which he could see were the only things about which he did worry. But again, like many Englishmen, he had one thin stream of imagination running underground deep in his subconscious life. He had been aware of the dark steady flow of it on certain occasions. Once, when as a child he had been taken to the pantomime and all the houses in Dick Whittington's London had rocked before the inebriated cook; once in an animal shop in Edgware Road when he had seen a sad monkey stare at him from behind the window; once when he had proposed marriage to a lady friend and had been rejected, and once when a motor car in which he was riding had killed a black Cocker spaniel.

On such occasions he had seen visions. It was as though the earth had opened up beneath his feet and he had realized that he was walking on a kind of hot pie crust over an underworld of energetic little demons. But for the most part he forgot these revelations and lived quietly enough with his tall, bony sister in a neat little house in Wimbledon, purusing every morning his successful little insurance job somewhere in the bowels of the city.

And he forgot the tiger.

It was this insurance business that sent him one day to New York. Quite an adventure for him. Phœbe, his sister, who was as kind as she was tiresome, and, though he didn't know it, absolutely necessary to his existence, was disturbed at his going alone. She would have liked

greatly to accompany him and hinted at this; but he sniffed at his coming freedom and would not have had her with him for anything. Nevertheless, when he found himself quite alone on the gigantic liner his heart failed him. He discovered that he had lived so long with his particular cronies that he had quite forgotten how to make new acquaintances. He was afraid to play cards lest he should lose his money, he couldn't dance, and for reading he had a kind of shyness as though by giving himself away to a book he was endangering some mysterious part of his morality. So he walked up and down the deck a great deal, very proudly holding his head up and daring any stranger to speak to him, but secretly hoping that some stranger might.

In New York, however, he was not lonely. That warmth and eagerness of hospitality which always astonishes every Englishman and sends him racing through strangely conflicting moods of suspicion, pride, and, although he tries not to show it, sentimentality—these caught little Homer Brown by the throat and caused him to think that after all he must be a very fine fellow indeed.

He started with a room at the Brevoort, but this was a little remote for his business, and in a very short while he was staying with a Mr. and Mrs. Moody in West Sixty-ninth Street.

Mr. and Mrs. Moody were very quiet Americans. Mrs. Moody was so quiet that you had to listen very carefully if you wanted to hear what she had to say. Mr. Moody was stout and broad-shouldered but oddly timorous for a Mid-Westerner. You would think to look at him that he would defy the world, but as a matter of simple fact, he couldn't defy a living thing. Englishmen are much more sentimental

than Americans, but they are not, of course, so demonstrative. Little Homer conceived slowly a passion for the large, hearty, and gentle Mr. Moody, and Mr. Moody, having been brought up in the usual American creed that ten American men were worth only one American woman, was surprised that anybody should pay him much attention. And before Homer Brown returned to England these two had formed a greater friendship than they knew.

Homer Brown was delighted with New York. He loved to feel that every minute of the day was important and it didn't matter to what you were hurrying so long as you hurried. The noise around him excited him as a small, rather lonely child is excited at a large children's party where everyone shouts and sings for no especial reason.

At home in Wimbledon he always went to bed at ten o'clock. In New York he found that he could be up till three or four in the morning and not feel at all tired the next day. At least, this was so for the three weeks that his business kept him in New York. It is true that he slept on the boat returning to England for three days and nights almost without a break. The sad thing was that, back in London again, he found himself unsettled. He missed the noise, the hurry, the cold sharp air, the sense of rise and fall as though he were sailing on an invigorating sea of waves and buildings, and he missed very much indeed the warmth of pleasure with which people had treated him. No one in London said that they were delighted to meet you, but only "Hello, old man. Haven't see you about lately." No lady in London told him to his face that he was too amusing for anything or that it had been just lovely being with him. And then, oddly, he missed the large Mr. Moody. He had never missed a man's company before. He wrote him

a rather affectionate letter, but received no answer. American men have time only for business letters.

And so it happened that he was very quick in manœuvring to send himself back to New York again. He was amazed at his own eagerness when one fine spring day he found himself once more plunging through the Atlantic, straining his eyes towards the Statue of Liberty. His first acute disappointment on arrival this time was to find that the Moodys were in Colorado. Mrs. Moody had not been well, and, as Homer knew, the slightest wish on her part was immediate law to Mr. Moody. He had a sentimental feeling that he would like to be near their street, so he found two rooms in one of the West Sixties, rather high up, and out of his window he could see on the left a huge building crashing to the ground and on the right another structure slowly climbing to the sky. Although the Moodys were away, he was not, of course, alone in New York. He had a whole circle of acquaintances, and almost every evening he went to a party, bathed in the splendid glamour like a tired business man having a holiday at the seaside. The summer came, and he did not return to England, and he did not leave New York. The Moodys were still away, and quite suddenly one hot summer's night he discovered himself to be alone. He sat in front of his open window looking at the pale purple-misted sky, listening to the hooting of the taxis, to the clanging electric hammer, to the wriggling, rasping clatter of the Elevated, and to the flashing of strange adventurous discovery; he had no invitation for that evening and nearly all his friends were away. What should he do? He would just walk out and take the air and let adventure have its own way.

When he had walked for a while he discovered that it is a very strange thing to be alone in New York. He had never been alone there before. He was standing in Fifth Avenue somewhere about Forty-fourth Street when he realized that he couldn't make up his mind to cross the street. He looked down the shining length of that wonderful avenue, saw the packs of motor cars and omnibuses held like animals in leash, knew that he must cross now if ever, and his legs refused to move. The lights changed and the cars swept down, and as they passed him they seemed to him to toss their heads and lick their lips as though they would say, "We should like to find you in our path—toss you in the air and then ride over you. One day we shall lure you forward." I have already said that in the main he had very little imagination, but once and again something stirred it, and it was the gleaming mass of those fiery eyes that held him now prisoner to the pavement. He pretended to himself that he was lingering there admiring the beautiful evening and watching the stars come out along the river of sky which ran between the high cliffs of the buildings. But it was not so. He was frightened. He didn't move because he didn't dare to move. New York was suddenly hostile and dangerous. Guarded by his friends, he had felt until now that the city was benignant and especially gratified that he should be there. The city was benignant no longer. He turned away, his heart beating, and after a while found himself in Broadway. Here was a lovely land—like the fairy play of one's childhood, scattered with silver and golden fruit. He admired the lighted sky signs, the cascade of silver that poured out of the purple fountain, the great flowers of amethyst and rose that unfolded in the middle of the sky and then faded tremblingly away, the

strange figures of dancing men that hung on ropes of crimson fire, turned somersaults, and vanished into thin air. And he loved with a strange trembling passion the building that soared into peaks of silver light far, far above the town. The only fairy palace ever seen by him in actual truth.

He stood staring at these things and was pushed about by the hurrying crowds. He bore them no malice. They, too, were the sharers of this marvellous fairyland. And then, withdrawing his eyes from the heights, it seemed to him for the first time that the faces on every side of him were pale and unhappy and apprehensive. The laughter appeared to him loud and false. The haste had something of panic in it. Shrill bells rang through the air. Everyone scattered and pressed against everyone else. The fire engines came clanging down the street, and it was as though he felt the ground rock under his feet.

He thought that he would go into some show, and after a while he pushed through some doors, paid his money at the box office for he knew not what, and was conducted by a girl, who looked at him with a sad and weary indifference, into his place. He had been to the theatre on many occasions before with his friends, and they had always been jolly together, or he had fancied that they had. He had never noticed before that many of the American theatres have no music in the intervals between the acts, nor had he realized how sadly American audiences sit, as though they were waiting for some calamity to occur. He looked on the row of faces that stretched out beyond him to the wall, and they all seemed to him grave, preoccupied, and weary. Again, apprehensive. He had often abused in London the chattering, foolish, chocolate-munching sibi-

lants of the theatre crowd, but he would have liked them to be with him to-night. The play was strange and odd, and for his Wimbledon propriety extremely indecent. It was concerned with ladies of easy virtue in China who were imprisoned in small gilt cages, and there was a woman with a white Chinese face who terrified him.

As the play proceeded it became for him more and more a bad dream, as though it were his dream and all the people watching it were all his creation. So strange a hold did this gain upon him that during the third act he was largely occupied with wondering what would happen to the audience when he woke up; what would become of them when he stretched his arms and, yawning, found them all vanishing into smoke as he looked around on the familiar things in his Wimbledon bedroom. The last act of the play presented an exotic situation in which a mother finds that she has unwittingly killed her own daughter. This seemed to little Homer the climax of his bad dream and, just as one always wakes up from a nightmare when the final crash arrives, so now Homer got up and walked out, although the play was not quite finished.

He hoped that his bad dream was over, but it was not. It seemed to continue with him as he walked through the plunging lights and shadows that played over Broadway. The faces now on every side of him were white and strained; everyone was feeling the heat of the night, and a large silver fountain in the middle of the sky that was forever spilling its water among the stars which it stridently outshone accentuated Homer's thirst so desperately that he went into a drug store and drank a strange sickly concoction of pineapple, ice cream, and soda water.

After that evening he never seemed quite to wake from his dream again. He received a letter from his sister urging him to come home. It appeared that for once they were enjoying a beautiful summer in England. It was neither too hot nor too cold. But as he read her letter he had a strange, aching vision of the dark cool lanes, the lap of the sea heard very faintly from across the fields, the sudden dip of the hills and the cottages, of the small villages nestling to the stream, roses and carnations everywhere. Of course he ought to go home. There was nothing to keep him here now. There had been nothing really to keep him this time at all. None of his friends was in New York, the weather would soon be appalling. It was not very comfortable in his lodgings, and he had always a strange little headache that ran like an odd tune, a little distorted, always through his head. Of course he ought to go home. But he could not. And he could not because he was held in this odd dreaming condition. Could he but wake up he would take the next boat back. Perhaps he would wake up to-morrow.

A few nights later the weather was desperately hot. There was no air, and after a brief sleep he woke to feel his heart pounding in his chest like a hammer. His windows were wide open, but there was no coolness. He lay there on his bed, his pajama jacket open, and the sweat pouring from his body. He threw off his pajamas, plunged into a cold bath, and then lay a little comforted, quite naked, on the top of his bed. As he lay there he heard, beneath the sharp staccato cry of an occasional car, a kind of purr as though someone were gently sleeping near by. Purr, purr, purr. . . . It was not, he assured himself, the

breathing of an individual, but simply the night sound of the city. He had never heard it quite like that before; and between the breathing there came short restless sounds as though someone were turning over or brushing something aside as he moved. The sound had a little of the rhythm of a train when in a sleeping car you wake in the middle of the night. Rhythm translating itself into a little tune, but this was not so much a tune as a measure that advanced and then receded and then advanced again. He had the idea that it was almost as though someone were walking in his sleep, padding stealthily along the quiet streets beyond his window, and, so thinking, at last he fell asleep.

Everyone who has lived in New York during hot weather must have noticed that the town seems to change completely its dwellers. Those who can afford it leave the city. But many of the inhabitants, Southerners, Negroes, South Americans who are accustomed to great heat, pervade the streets with a kind of new ownership. They have a sort of pride as though this were their weather and they alone knew how to deal with it. They walk about as though they owned the town. Homer, coming one morning out of his door, noticed passing him a large, stout, honey-coloured Negro. Rather a handsome fellow, with the free disengaged movements of an animal. His big heavy body was clothed in dark, quiet garments, and he passed with lithe, springy gestures. Homer did not know why he noticed him. The Negro did not look at him but passed on with his strange determined ease down the street. That evening Homer met him again. "He must live near here," Homer thought. Then he had a curious idea. "If he were naked and in a dark forest you would think that he was an animal."

That night once again Homer dreamed of the tiger. It was not so hot a night, but damp and humid. Homer was once again walking with naked feet on sharp spiky grass. And once again he was held with sudden terror, and once again saw the gleaming eyes and smelled the thick fetid breath of an animal. He woke in a panic of terror and was at first delighted to find that he was in his plain simple little room, and then he was horrified to discover that the smell of an animal's breath seemed still to linger with him in the room. It was so strong that he could not possibly be imagining it. He got up, walked about the room sniffing. He went to the window and leaned out and saw the town lying under a dazzling sheet of stars. There was a little breeze, and when he turned back into the room again he found the smell was gone. In the morning it was as though he had had actual contact with some animal, and he had hard work to convince himself that some large dark-coloured beast had not padded round his room while he slept. He seriously examined himself. "This won't do," he said to himself. "This hot weather is getting on your nerves. You must leave for England at once."

He went that very morning to some shipping office, booked a passage for himself for the next week, and sent a cable to his sister. He felt now as though at last he had awaked from his dream, and England seemed to come very close to him with its cool breezes and long, gently undulating moors and sudden little woods with scattered anemones. But while he was sitting in his little Italian restaurant eating his luncheon he heard again through the open door a purr as if it were of someone breathing close beside him, and as he heard it his body trembled as though someone said to him, "You are not going home. You will

never go home." That afternoon he sat in Central Park and watched the blue, motionless water and felt a desperate longing for Moody's return. "I am not very well," he said to himself. "It is as though I am only half awake. Must be this hot weather," and he did a strange thing —he went up to some children who were playing at the edge of the water and put his hand on the arm of one of them and spoke to it about something. The child answered him gravely, not at all alarmed, and pointed to some boat that it was sailing on the water. The child was a real thing. But was it not part of his dream? If he woke suddenly in his W mbledon bedroom, where would the child be? So he hurried home in a panic, and then, just outside his door, passed again the large, heavy Negro, who did not look at him, but went on padding steadily forward. He hurried into his house.

When the time for the actual sailing came he did not go. He sent a cable to his sister saying, "Important business prevents leaving. Sailing later." But there *was* no important business. The weather grew ever more hot, but he was accustomed to it now and, although it depressed him, he liked it. He liked, too, the slightly acrid, rather fetid smell that seemed now to accompany him everywhere. For a while he was puzzled as to where he had known this smell before, and then he thought of the monkey rooms and the snake rooms in the London zoo. It had been just that warmth, damp and pungent.

On a very hot afternoon, sitting in his room, he suddenly thought, "There must be animals somewhere. Animals that like this heat." It was, he imagined, what a jungle smell would be; and the light beyond his windows beating down from the blazing blue sky onto the roofs and

pavements had a glossy shimmer as though he were looking at a scene through very thin sheets of opalescent metal. Then, once he had this idea that there were animals about, he began to wonder where they would be. He had the odd fancy to picture to himself this vast city, honeycombed with underground cells and passages, like the dark shadowy cells behind the Roman amphitheatres where they kept their beasts for feast days and holidays. It would be a strange thing were the whole of New York built about these dark stone cellars and the wild beasts forever prowling there. Sitting at his window in his pajamas, he fancied how these hordes of animals would slink about, padding their way from passage to passage, and the only things seen in that gray dusk were thousands and thousands of fiery eyes, and then it might happen one day that some of them would escape and appear in the streets. Lions and tigers and leopards and panthers, dazzled at first by the bright staring light and then accustomed to it, plunging into the middle of the multitudes. A great lion with tawny head finding its way through the entrance of one of those vast skyscrapers, padding up the stairs, and then confronting a group of clerks and stenographers. Yes, that would be fine, and how the people would rush from the building to the street! He'd heard it said that if all the human beings ran at the same moment from the skyscrapers into the street they would be piled one upon the other five deep, and he could see them heaped up in this hot dry weather, struggling in masses, and from the windows of the building the lions and tigers peering down at them and waiting with slow licking lips for the splendid meal that was coming to them.

Moving from this still further, he came to his own es-

pecial tiger. The animal about which he had dreamed so many years ago, waiting now for him somewhere in the underground beneath the street. At this thought a pleasant warm shiver ran through his body. He put his hand in front of his eyes as though he would shut out from them some picture, and the familiar animal smell seemed to increase in the room.

It was just then, at the end of August, that the Moodys returned to New York. Homer was very glad to see them, but not as glad as he would have been a month ago, because he had now something else to think about. They didn't know about all these animals, all these beasts prowling under the streets in the shadowy dark. And they must not know, because they would think him foolish and wouldn't understand. So, because he had a secret from them, he was very mysterious and preoccupied and not so frank with them as he had been. They noticed, of course, the change and commented on it to each other. Moody had a real affection for this little Englishman, largely because he had been noticed by him and made to suppose that he was somebody; partly because he had a truly kind heart and wanted people to be happy; so he was distressed and asked Mrs. Moody, for whose opinion and judgment he had the profoundest respect, if she knew what the matter could be. "He seems preoccupied with something," he said to her. "He always thinks of something else. He doesn't look well at all. Perhaps it's the heat that's got on his nerves. Englishmen can't stand it. When I was in his room last night he asked me whether I noticed a smell. I noticed nothing. But he said that I should in time. He seems to have a terror of the subway. He implored me

yesterday not to use it. His eyes were terrified as he spoke to me about it. I don't like the look of things at all. I think he'd better go home."

But Homer now saw the Moodys through a dark glass. He wondered how it could be that all the inhabitants of New York were not aware of their great danger. He thought it might be his duty to write to one of the papers about it. But after all, the animals had been there so long the people must all know. He supposed that they were so confident of their control that it didn't worry them. But suppose you had, as he had, one particular animal who was watching and waiting for you. He knew now exactly where his tiger must be. Somewhere underground between Fortieth and Forty-fourth streets where the traffic and the press of people are thickest, and he began to be fascinated by that part of New York. He found that if he went down to the Grand Central Station and stood on that great shining floor he could almost hear the animals moving beneath his feet, and he fancied that if he went lower down through the gates to the trains and stood there in absolute silence when no trains were passing he would be able to hear very clearly soft feet moving and the heavy bodies brushing the one against the other.

So one day he got permission from the station master to go and meet a train, and he went through the gate and for five minutes was alone there, save for the coloured porters, and behind the silence he heard quite clearly the whispering footfalls. There must be many beasts there, thousands, perhaps, and you can imagine how one would push ahead of the others and wait, his eyes eagerly fixed, for the black gate to open. And one day it might be that the Negroes who brought them their food, great red lumps of bleeding

meat, would be a little careless, and some of the beasts would slip past and moving noiselessly would be up on the sunlit street before anyone knew that they were there. His own especial tiger would be waiting more eagerly than any of them. He must be a great strong beast with a huge head and gigantic muscles. One scratch of his paw and your cheek would be torn open, and then, at the sight of the blood, the tiger would tremble all over and his eyes would shine until they were like great lamps, and then he would spring.

Then one night Homer told Moody about it. He had not intended to tell him, but it irritated him that that great heavy man should be sitting so calmly in his room and not notice the acrid smell. He told him first about the big honey-coloured Negro who was always passing down his street, and Moody thought there was nothing odd in that; so that Homer, thoroughly exasperated, burst out with, "He is one of the keepers. Although he hasn't told me I know it and he knows that I know it."

"One of the keepers?" asked Moody. "Keep of what?"

"Why, of the beasts, of course. Can't you smell them everywhere?" He went on then and said that he couldn't understand why people were not frightened. "It would be so easy some day for one of the animals to steal out while the keeper wasn't looking. Or suppose they went for the keepers one day and broke out—hundreds of them—into the streets. That would be a nice thing. You would see people run for their lives then, all right."

Moody became greatly alarmed but, as always when one's friends are odd or queer, adopted a tone of quiet reassurance as though he were speaking to a sick child. He consulted with Mrs. Moody, and the result of this was that

he invited Homer to go with him one day to call upon a friend of his. Homer went with him most readily and had with this kind gentleman two hours of most interesting conversation. The interesting, quiet man who talked to him and asked him questions was surprised at nothing which Homer had to tell him. When Homer spoke about the animals he nodded his head and said, "I know. When did you first notice it?"

Homer, delighted to discover that he had found a sensible person at last, told him everything. "You see," he said, "I shouldn't really mind, myself, a bit, but of course I am a little uneasy because of my own tiger. You can quite understand that it isn't pleasant to feel that he can escape at any time. Then he would come straight for me. He knows just where I am."

"Why not," said the quiet little man, "go home for a while? Your tiger won't follow you to England."

"Ah," said Homer mysteriously, "I am not so sure. Besides, don't you think it would be cowardly? And then, there's something exciting in defying him. I am not going to show him I am afraid," and a little warm tremor ran all over his body.

His kind friend asked him many questions about his childhood. When he was very young, had he been taken to the zoo and had he looked at the tigers there? Homer nodded his head. Of course he had. Had he when he was very young been shown pictures of tigers? Yes, of course he had, but what had that to do with it? His little friend agreed that, of course, it had nothing to do with it, but it was just interesting. It was suggested to him that he should come and see his little friend quite often, and Homer said that he would, but, nevertheless, he had no intention

of doing so. This man took it all too quietly. He would wake up one day and find out his mistake.

Early in September there came those warm days; close days that are perhaps the most trying moments of all the American climate. If you took a walk you were at once bathed in perspiration. The town had indeed, for even less active imaginations than Homer's, a jungle air. The traffic now was terrific. Down on Fifth Avenue the cars would stand packed in serried ranks. Then, on the changing of the lights, they would slide furiously forward for a brief space, then sit back on their haunches again.

It happened one evening that, hurrying home in the dusk, Homer, looking up the street, saw these hundreds of gleaming eyes and thought with a furious beating of his heart that the moment had arrived at last and that the animals had escaped. He realized at once, of course, that it was the traffic; and yet, was it? Were not these things alive and acting from their own volition? It might be that they were in union with the beasts and were acting under command, and one day, at a given order, they would suddenly take the thing into their own hands. In great armies of shining metal they would drive the trembling thousands of tiny human beings into panic-stricken mobs, and the animals would be released.

This was fanciful, perhaps, but when he returned to his room he knew with a sudden certainty that his tiger was free. Homer did not know how he was aware of it, but he was certain. What must he do? He wanted to escape. He was trembling with fear, but at the same time he wanted to face the animal. Some horrid fascination held him. He could imagine himself walking down some dark side street,

lit only by some scattered lights, shaking slightly with the reverberation of the overhead railway, and then, turning a corner, there the tiger would be. He sat there all night, not sleeping, sitting on his bed, wondering what he must do. At about three in the morning, obeying some curious impulse, he barricaded his door, putting two chairs in front of it and pushing his bed toward it. When day came he must buy a gun; but of what use would that be? He didn't know one end of a gun from another, and, besides, it was hopeless. No gun that he could buy would injure the Tiger. His fate was certain. He could not escape it.

That morning Moody came to see him. He entered very cheerfully. "Now, my friend," he said, "what's this, you're not dressed? Come on, take a bath and come have a meal with Mrs. Moody and myself. You are not well, you know. Mrs. Moody wants you to come and stay with us for a bit. Cheerful company, that's what you want."

Homer thanked him, shook his head. It was very kind of him, but he was very busy just then and would come and see them in a day or two. Moody talked to him for a little and then, apparently alarmed at Homer's expression, went away.

When the evening came Homer dressed and went out. First he walked on Fifth Avenue and, as the traffic rushed by him, felt an oppressive, bewildering excitement. He knew beyond doubt that now the tiger had come very close to him. He must be very near any one of these side streets. There were so many animals that the keepers had probably not yet discovered the loss of one of them. The tiger was waiting in some dark alley or court, crouched against the wall in the shadow. At every step that he took he was being drawn irresistibly nearer. He was no longer afraid,

but only strung up to some great pitch of emotion, as though the supreme moment of his life had at last come. He was oddly hungry (he had eaten scarcely anything for days) and he went into a little Italian restaurant. He sat down in a corner and saw that there was a very good meal for a dollar. You could have antipasta, minestrone, spaghetti, broccoli, and all for a dollar. At a large table near him some twenty people were having a feast and were laughing and joking very loudly. In the far corner a violin and a piano were playing gay tunes. The minestrone was very good—hot and thick. He talked to the waiter and asked him if he liked New York. The waiter liked it very much. "Now here was a real town. Something was going on all the time and there was money about. Lots of money. You could pick it up all sorts of ways." Homer was about to say, "Yes, but suppose the animals get loose one day, where will you be then?" But he didn't say it, stopped by a kind of sense that it would be bad form to mention it. He sat there staring at the gay supper party. They didn't seem to care. What would they do if he went over to them and told them that just up the street a great tiger with huge velvety haunches was waiting? They might not believe it, and then he would look foolish, and, in any case, this was the one thing that in New York nobody mentioned.

After a while he paid his bill and went out. He was now in one of those streets that seem in the evening to be the very borderland of madness. Overhead the trains rattled, on the right the street was "up" showing black cabins of darkness and then a blaze of burning light. The trains came clattering up, issuing from forests of armed girders and tangled masonry; people hurried by as though they

knew that this was a dangerous place and that they must not pause there for a moment.

Homer took a deep breath, stepped forward into the middle of the street, stared past the bright lights of a drug store, and then, with a whirl of concentrated knowledge, as though everything in his past life had suddenly leaped to meet him, in one swift instant knew that the time had come. Facing him as he stood there at the very issue of the dark side street opposite him crouched the tiger. Although the street was so dark, Homer could see every detail of his body. He was very like a huge cat streaked with his beautiful colours. His eyes burning just as Homer knew that they would do. His head moving very slightly from side to side. With that vision, terror leaped upon Homer. He turned, screaming there in the middle of the street, and even as he turned, the tiger jumped. The huge body was upon him. He felt the agonizing blow and then sank deep into pits of darkness.

A crowd collected. His body was dragged out from under the taxicab. The driver began an eloquent explanation. It had not been his fault. The man had seemed bewildered by the lights, had run straight into the cab. There was no time for the driver to do anything. The policeman took notes, an ambulance was summoned.

The Moodys heard of the accident that night. It appeared that it was nobody's fault. Homer had been crossing the street and, becoming bewildered, turned back and was struck by the taxi.

About three the next morning, Moody woke up quietly trembling and at last roused his wife. He talked to her about the poor little Englishman. "I suppose," he said,

"staying here in the heat was too much for him. Odd thing that, his imagining that some animal was after him." He lay there, greatly discomforted. "New York's getting a queer place," he said. "You can imagine anything if you let yourself. All this traffic for instance. They look like animals at night sometimes." He turned and took his wife's hand in his. "A bit close in here," he said. "You don't smell anything, do you? Sort of animal smell?"

"Why, no, dear, of course not," said Mrs. Moody.

"Imagination, I suppose," said Moody. "Funny thing if this town went wild one day."

But Mrs. Moody was a sensible woman, not given to silly fancies. She patted her husband's shoulder and so fell asleep. But Mr. Moody lay there looking into the darkness.

NO UNKINDNESS INTENDED

I

THE smallest of the Munden children, meaning no unkindness whatever to the piece of paper on which she had written her very bad French exercise, crumpled it into a ball and threw it out of the open window. She certainly hadn't the least idea that pieces of paper have any feelings, and perhaps they haven't; on the other hand . . .

The ball of paper, looking maliciously alive because two of Miss Munden's full stops came just where the eyes ought to be and a straight line that she had drawn through her French verb did for a mouth, fell on to the grass plot outside the Mundens' hideous villa. Now the ball of paper intended no unkindness whatever, it bore no grudge against Miss Munden for having treated it so; indeed, it had more life in it now than it had known before. It lay on the grass and considered its position, and while it considered it the little afternoon breeze, which meant no unkindness to anyone in the world, but was merely idle and had nothing very much to do, rolled the ball of paper about a little and gently directed it to the very feet of Mr. Munden, senior, who came through the gate at that very moment and up the gravel path.

Now, as all his friends and especially his family were very thoroughly aware, if there was one thing that Mr. Eric Munden detested above all others it was any kind of

untidiness or litter. He prided himself immensely upon everything that belonged to him. He had not prided himself very greatly on Miss Ruby Lessing before he married her, he had indeed married her simply to revenge himself on Miss Monica White who had married another when she ought to have married him; but once Miss Ruby Lessing became Mrs. Eric Munden she was the pride of his life. He bustled around her, tidying up a bit here and putting another bit straight there snipping off on one side something that he found superfluous and adding something that he found necessary on another until he finally set up in his villa a monument of all the Munden virtues, a testimony to his pride forever and ever. If Mrs. Eric Munden lost her soul in the process, who was aware of it? Certainly not Mr. Munden. No unkindness was intended on his part; he had, in fact, done her a world of good. It was the same with his villa and his family: he hadn't liked the building very much when he had first seen it, but as soon as he had bought it and called it "Ivanhoe" there was no villa in the whole world like it.

Also with his children. Had they been begotten by any other male he would have considered them plain, dull, and lifeless, but as he was responsible for their existence (Mrs. Munden's share in the matter was of no importance) he considered them marvellous children. But he did like tidiness, and when he saw the ball of paper lying on the path he was extremely annoyed; he kicked it violently with his foot, and then, kicking more urgently than he had intended, made a large hole in the gravel.

It was at this precise moment that old Mr. Hannaway came to beg for something.

II

It was very like him indeed to come at exactly the wrong moment; he had been making his entry at the wrong moment all his life. He was the vicar of a very small parish on the outskirts of Seatown's slums; he had been a vicar there for over thirty years. He had been always an unlucky man; he was unlucky in the first place because he was so insignificant, he was neither tall nor fat nor short nor thin, he was not so untidy that you must feel sure that he had brains, nor was he so neat that you would call him smart for a parson. His voice was modest and unassuming and quite without effect, he was not so shy as to seem interesting, nor was he eloquent enought to hold an audience. He had never found any woman who had noticed him sufficiently to marry him, although it is said (and I am quite sure falsely) that the women of England will marry anybody. He had never had violent religious views so that his parishioners sent angry letters to his bishop, he never neglected his duties enough to be dismissed and so cause a sensation in that manner. He had always been desperately poor, but that was the extravagant feature in his life that everyone had taken trouble not to notice. His heart was full of love for others, but he had no gift for expressing his feelings. He was fifty-nine years of age and would be sixty next month.

He had always felt that if he were vicar of Crumplehorn parish at the age of sixty he might be said to have failed in life, and he was determined not to fail. He had always had burning ambitions, although nobody knew it, and as one opportunity after another had passed him by he had

always said, "Well, next time it shall be better"; only he felt that if he ever reached sixty without its being better there was the end. And now it was within a week of that critical date.

It was the knowledge of this some two or three days earlier that had roused him into a sudden campaign for his poor parishioners. Being a shy man and a modest, if there was one thing in the world from which he shrank it was begging for anything, whether for himself or others. It is true that he did it most ineffectively because he always seemed to imply before he made his request that he knew that you were going to refuse it, and then of course you did; no beggar has any hope of success unless he is brazen, as all true beggars know. During these last days he had, alas, failed more than he had succeeded; everyone, he was bound to confess, had been very kind, but it had been in the main that sterile kindness that clergymen so often encounter.

He looked timidly at Mr. Munden, who was just about to enter his front door. "Good-afternoon, sir, good-afternoon, sir," he said as brightly as he could.

"Good-afternoon," said Mr. Munden, looking at him sternly, still exasperated by a conviction in his mind that his beautiful front lawn was a litter of mess and disorder.

"Might I have a word with you?" said Mr. Hannaway.

"Certainly," said Mr. Munden; "I am rather busy but——"

"Oh, I won't take a minute," said Mr. Hannaway.

They went indoors to Mr. Munden's library; he called it a library, but it did not contain many books, and it was not very large. On the way thither Mr. Munden encountered the dog. Now this dog had been given to the Munden family by a friend in the town who, out of sheer kindness

of heart, felt that it needed a better home than he could provide for it. His heart, in fact, was so kind that it did not allow him to stop and consider that he was giving the dog away because he disliked it extremely; he might, of course, have drowned it, but he was a tender-hearted man and couldn't bear to hurt anything.

Mrs. Munden, also out of kindness of heart, had kept the animal because "the children would love to have a dog." Her general amiability prevented her from seeing that the children hated it from the first and ill-treated it on every possible occasion. But no one hated the dog quite so much as Mr. Munden. Although it belonged now to the Mundens, he could not be proud of it, try as he might. It was not a beautiful animal; a brown Cocker spaniel by birth, it had doubtless many fine points that only a real dog fancier could name, but it was not very old, a year at the most; its skin was not silky as the skin of a Cocker should be; it stared wildly out of its eyes, and its mouth and nose were too large for its head. It was also long and shambly in the legs.

By nature it was desperately affectionate and demonstrative at all the wrong moments. Had it been a handsome and charming dog that would not have mattered, but people who are really kind hate to be loved when they cannot give love back again; it seems so ungracious of them and makes them suspicious of their own good-nature.

It most unfortunately followed Mr. Munden and Mr. Hannaway into the library, wagging its untidy tail, and then jumping up against Mr. Munden, rolling its mad eyes in its desperation of affection. "Down, you beastly dog, damn you," said Mr. Munden, and then was extremely sorry, first because he wished to appear friendly and

tender-hearted towards everyone and secondly because he had said "damn" in front of a clergyman. "Excuse me just a moment," he asked. He pushed the dog in front of him out of the room, then closed the door behind him. Out in the passage he looked guiltily about him; no one was near. He picked up the dog and very stealthily opened the front door, went down the garden path, opened the gate, looked along the empty road and then edged the dog into it. He shut the gate carefully.

At that moment a boy passed him whistling. "Like to earn a shilling?" he asked almost in a whisper. The boy stared at him amazed, such generosity had seldom come his way. "Take this dog and do what you like with him, anything you like, only don't hurt him. Call him Tiger and he'll follow you."

He turned back to the house; he had done a really kind action. The boy looked a decent boy, he would probably be very fond of the dog, the dog was obviously unsuited to the Munden household; he had as usual done the best for everyone concerned. He went back to the house intending to do his best for Mr. Hannaway.

III

Mr. Munden motioned Mr. Hannaway to one arm-chair and himself sat down in another. "Now, what can I do for you?" he asked. Mr. Hannaway, sitting on the very edge of his chair, rubbed his hands on the knees of his trousers and began to explain. It was like this: as Mr. Munden probably knew, his parish was a very poor one (at the word "poor" Mr. Munden's countenance became stern), and of course Mr. Hannaway didn't like begging, and above all things in the world he hated to bother Mr.

Munden, and indeed he didn't want to bother anybody, but if he didn't say something for the poor people who was going to? Here he came to a stammering pause, and as he paused he was acutely conscious that he was doing it all extraordinarily badly, and he ought to have come out at once with his facts and been hard and businesslike. But he was hampered to-day more severely than ever before, because he felt so intensely the desperate need that Mr. Munden should give him something. If Mr. Munden didn't, then he must go to Mrs. Morrison-Smith, and, oh, how he hated going to Mrs. Morrison-Smith; his soul trembled at the thought of it. If Mr. Munden gave him something, then he might go home, his conscience appeased, nor would he feel so desperately this approaching crisis of his sixty years. On the other hand, if both Mr. Munden and Mrs. Morrison-Smith refused him, then he would have to go out to-morrow and begin all over again with other terrible people, and then again the day after that, and so on. No, no, he must succeed, here and now. And all this time Mr. Munden was wondering with half his mind how he could get rid of the old fool, and with the other half of his mind, whether there was any more litter in the garden and, if so, who had put it there. "Give me a few facts," he said. Facts, indeed, Mr. Hannaway had plenty of, there was scarcely anyone in his parish who didn't need money for one reason or another; the Boys' Club was perishing for lack of money, the Girls' Club also, the Parish Library was without books, the Sunday School without proper teachers, the church pews without kneelers, and there were a thousand other things!

Only he could not remember them in any proper order. He was like an old man with a butterfly net. The facts,

brightly coloured and of a dazzling brilliance, were forever eluding him, so he jumbled them all up together and talked about boys' clubs and vestry meetings and choir treats and old women and families far too large for the rooms that contained them, and all so confusedly that he must have struck Mr. Munden very much as the White Knight struck Alice.

For Mr. Munden, like Alice, could not be anything but kind, only during the first part of Mr. Hannaway's explanation his brain was discovering what would be the true kind reason for refusing Mr. Hannaway. He need not really refuse him, he had plenty of money, more indeed than he knew what to do with, but Mr. Hannaway was so obviously a person that must be refused, he was such a feckless, wandering, muddled old man. Ah, that was it! There was his kind reason: it would not be good for Mr. Hannaway's character to be given money until he was more practical in his explanation of his disposing of it. So, while Mr. Hannaway continued his trembling narrative, Mr. Munden chose his words.

"Yes," he said gently at last, "but, if you'll forgive my saying so, you haven't as yet planned out your needs in a very orderly fashion. What I mean is, that if you will come to me again some day with a definite practical plan I shall be only too glad to see what I can do. I can promise nothing definitely," he added in haste; "we business men have great calls on our charity, you quite understand that," and he beamed upon the old man as though he were his father and was discussing with him his school report.

"Yes, I suppose so," Mr. Hannaway said, sighing heavily. He knew that he ought to go on and press his claim, he knew that when people asked for things they were always

refused at first, but for the life of him he could say no more, he could only mumble something about Mr. Munden being very kind, and then, his head down and terror in his heart, because now he must face Mrs. Morrison-Smith, he stumbled out of the room.

Mr. Munden saw him depart with feelings of the greatest affection; he had treated the old man with the greatest kindness and even generosity, so he felt.

He went upstairs to tell Mrs. Munden so.

IV

The dog meanwhile passed gaily forward to a new destiny. He didn't know it was a new destiny; he thought that this was another member of the Munden family who was taking him out for a walk. In spite of constant shocks and unexpected reverses he had still an absolute confidence in the goodness of human nature. He ambled along finding the world full of ent cing smells and expecting that very soon he would return to the warm comfort of the Munden household and the security of the kitchen fire.

The boy, whose name was Percy Smith, was a nice kind boy. He had been taught by his father, who was a butcher by trade, that if you wanted to get on in the world you should pretend to be generous even when you were not. From his very earliest days Percy had been, on the surface, at any rate, exemplary. He had passed through his Sunday school with the greatest credit, receiving any number of those little cards with pictures that are given to boys who are punctual in the r attendance, clean in their appearance, and intelligent in their answers. He had known the order of the Kings of Israel and Judah better than any other boy of his period. In his Board School, too, he had

been admirable. Whenever he cheated in class or bullied a smaller boy or took anything that didn't belong to him he atoned for these mistakes by his bright polite manners to his elders and betters and his charming ready smile.

He had a great affection for dogs, dogs, that is, of the right kind, but he had not proceeded far on his way before he discovered from the remarks of passers-by that Tiger was not the right kind of dog at all. He had not thought that he looked so odd at first, but now with every step he was made acutely aware of his embarrassing situation. Rude boys called out at him, girls laughed at him, and people in motor cars turned round and pointed. Now, if there was one thing in the world that Percy Smith detested it was to be a figure of fun; to be made a jest of hurt his Smith pride. He was moving now in Mr. Hannaway's parish, that dreary collection of small streets, houses exactly similar, gutters scattered with dirty children, and hawkers with depressing barrows of dates and bananas. It was an extremely cold day, and neglected little flakes of snow were falling in melancholy, hesitating fashion through the air. Percy Smith wanted to hasten on with his job, which was to deliver certain parcels at certain addresses and return home to his tea, his bread and jam, and his father the butcher. The dog was delaying him; it seemed to have no proper sense of direction, but would wander now this way, now that, forever excited by some new thing.

He paused to consider this difficult situation, and Tiger, mistaken as usual, burst into demonstrations of love and enthusiasm, barking and jumping up and showing to all the world his pride and delight in the Munden family, to which admirable household he supposed that Percy belonged.

Now Percy was a kind boy, he wouldn't do anyone any harm for all the world, but he felt that he had fairly earned his shilling. Someone as kind as himself would soon come along, so he took a piece of string out of his pocket, tied the dog to one of the railings and hurriedly turned the corner. As he explained that night: "You see, Father, it was really the kindest thing to do. Someone would be sure to take a fancy to him who would be able to look after him much better than we could; it would have been cruel to give him to a policeman, don't you think? I wanted to do what was right."

And his father, delighted that his son should be progressing so finely, gave him an extra piece of bread and jam.

V

Mr. Hannaway found Mrs Morrison-Smith's house only too easily. It was a large, fine building with big gardens through which the old man was a long time fumbling his way. It was a dark gray afternoon, and soon there would be snow, he thought, shivering a little; he was not very warmly clad.

If only Mr. Munden had given him a small sum; a pound would have been something, and he knew that Mr. Munden could easily afford it. This knowledge depressed him the more because he felt that it was entirely his own fault that he had been refused, all his own incompetence and muddled brain. But most deeply of all did he wish that Mr. Munden hadn't spoken to him like a father—after all, he was older than Mr. Munden, but he did not know how it was, people always spoke to clergymen as though they were children or idiots.

He rang the bell and was admitted into a grand hall by a very shining and supercilious maid. He asked for Mrs. Morrison-Smith; he was told that if he would wait the maid would see. While she was seeing (and she took a long time about it) he was enclosed in a little room all bright pink wall paper and ferns in pots. The room was very cold; there was no fire. He was sick in the stomach at the thought of appealing to Mrs. Morrison-Smith; if she refused him he would go home, and what he feared above everything else was sitting alone in front of his fire that evening and considering himself. He knew that a crisis was upon him and that a little more self-consideration would bring him to such a point of contempt that he did not know what might not happen. He must be clear and accurate and definite now if ever, have all his facts nicely marshalled, give her confidence in his ability to use her money well.

And when she came in the very sight of her confused him completely. She was a large woman, full-bosomed, her shining white hair piled high on her splendid head. She also jingled with a multitude of little charms, lockets, and bracelets.

She had been, when the maid spoke to her, entertaining several friends in her bright and beautiful drawing room. She had intended to invite him to join them, but at the sight of him she faltered. She was a most generous woman, overflowing with the milk of human kindness, as her ample figure indeed suggested, but when she saw him she knew that he had come to ask for something, and she knew too that his presence would embarrass the others, so she decided in the kindest manner possible not to invite him.

"Dear Mr. Hannaway, how delightful to see you, you come here far too seldom."

"Yes," he said, "thank you very much indeed," and then he paused.

"And how are you and how is everybody? I always say that you clergymen put us all to shame the way you work and the good you do for others."

This was a promising beginning; Mr. Hannaway plunged right in. "I have come to ask you to help us," he said, trying to smile confidently; "the Boys' Club needs assistance terribly badly, we have a debt of £45:3:6, and then the Girls' Club . . ."

His voice wandered away, his smile faded. He was fascinated by Mrs. Morrison-Smith's bosom and shining hair. She was goodness itself.

"Dear me, isn't that terrible! To think that there's all that debt! It hurts one dreadfully to know about it. Life should be so free and beautiful for all of us, don't you think? I always say that if life isn't beautiful for the very youngest and poorest of us how can we sleep in comfort?"

"Yes," said Mr. Hannaway nervously, "and there's the old women's treat coming very shortly, and the subscriptions for it this year have not been so good as they ought to be, and—and—there's the girls' club . . ." His voice wandered off again.

Mrs. Morrison-Smith beamed upon him and she was thinking, "I do hope he won't keep me long, I wonder he doesn't understand it's just tea-time," and then beyond this the further thought unknown to herself, "How can I get rid of him without hurting his feelings?"

Mr. Hannaway was thinking, "It won't hurt you to give me a pound, you simply won't feel it," and he nearly cried out in a kind of desperation, "If you don't give me a pound, I'll smash everything in the room, I simply can't bear to go back to-night without it." But of course he didn't say anything, he only smiled at her feebly.

Mrs. Morrison-Smith's kind feelings overwhelmed her and they all led her in one direction, namely, to get him out of the house as quickly as possible without giving him anything. "Oh, but that's shocking," she cried, "you should have written to me about it, letters are so much more satisfactory so that one can see just how things stand. Dear Mr. Hannaway, I do feel for you so much, and if only there weren't so many claims upon me already, I'd simply love to help you. I always say that if there's one thing we who are more fortunate ought to do it is to help the others. Small though my resources are in comparison with many I do try to make that my principle." She smiled at him as though she would embrace him, then, as he said nothing, continued moving to the door: "Write to me, won't you, write me a letter about it, giving me all the facts. Yes, a letter's the thing, isn't it?"

"Oh, don't you think——" he began, but she opened the door, not having heard him, and went on: "Send me a letter as soon as you can, I am sure that I can help some way; and come and see me again, I do so sympathize with all your difficulties."

Afterwards, in the drawing room, she said to her friends: "It was poor Mr. Hannaway, our vicar. Poor old man, I do hope I was kind; clergymen of the poorer parishes do have such a hard time." And everyone thought she was very kind indeed.

Mr. Hannaway, stumbled through the garden again, noticed that it was beginning to snow.

VI

The dog, tied by a piece of string to the railing, couldn't at all understand what had happened to him. The nice member of the Munden family had disappeared; he pulled violently at the string. For the first time in his life he began to suspect human nature, and the first moment of that suspicion is a very serious one in a dog's life. He ran in different directions trying to break the string, he tugged and barked and tugged again. A wind had risen and the snow was beginning to fall heavily. An old lady carrying parcels came down the street. She was a very nice old lady, Mrs. Williams, renowned in her immediate circle for her independence, common sense, and generous instincts; especially did she believe in being kind to animals. But she was in a hurry, what with the wind and the snow, and because Mr. Williams didn't like to wait for his tea.

She saw the dog and stopped. "Poor little dog. Well, if that isn't a shame—someone's tied it up. I wonder whether there's a policeman anywhere." She was one of those old ladies who always in any crisis thought first of a policeman. She looked around and, as is frequently the case in the town of Polchester, there was no policeman anywhere to be seen. The dog, seeing her observe him thus closely, was sure at once that here was one of his kind friends come to help him. Barking with joy, he jumped up and down, endeavouring to reach her as closely as the string allowed him. But what is a kind old lady in such a situation to do? The dog might belong to somebody, she might be put into prison for stealing somebody's dog,

and in any case, she couldn't take it home with her, Mr. Williams didn't like dogs. But she was as good as she could be, and the dog, poor creature, was likely to strangle himself if she left him there.

She looked on every side of her and then saw some children running down towards her. "Poor little doggie," she said, "poor dear little doggie," and then, as the children approached, addressed them. "Now, children, is this your little dog?" There were three of them, two boys and a girl.

"No, mum," they said, gazing with all their eyes as though they saw an extraordinary sight, a hippopotamus or perhaps an alligator.

"Do you know whose little dog it is?"

"No, mum."

"But it oughtn't to be tied like that, it'll do itself a hurt."

"Yes, mum."

"Now, suppose you just wait a minute here until a policeman comes and then give it to the policeman; don't hurt the poor little doggie."

"No, mum."

And Mrs. Williams hurried on to Mr. Williams, conscious that yet one more good action crowned her day.

Once the old lady was out of sight, the children undid the string. They were good little children in process of being well brought up; if there was one thing that they had been taught, it was to be kind to animals, but their education was not quite completed. Here was a dog, let's have some fun with it!

The dog, meanwhile, delighted with its freedom, leaped and bounded all about them: all was well, here were friends again, what a lucky dog he was. But the elder of

the two boys (Harold was his name) thought there was no fun in being with a dog unless you did something to it. It was simply in the joy of his young heart that he felt this necessity, he meant no harm for all he knew dogs liked having things done to them.

Moreover, this was the sort of dog to whom you simply had to do something, a funny lop-sided mongrel animal. So, when they had run a little way, the dog confidently and joyously with them (and now they were approaching a more crowded street), young Harold saw in the gutter a small battered tin can. "Just the thing," he proclaimed eagerly to his younger brother and sister, and filled with the eager exuberance of youth he took the can and the piece of string, and in another instant the can was most humorously united to the dog's stumpy tail.

The children were all delighted with the effect of their cleverness; how funny the little dog looked! But at the same time they were aware that the snow was falling fast, that it was growing dark, that it was tea time, and that the policeman might come, so, after laughing and shouting and dancing round the absurd animal, they hurried away.

The dog tried at first to follow them, but there were many people about, the world was odd and strange and uncouth. He ran a little way and stopped, then sudden terror fell upon him. He, who had never known what it was to be frightened, what it was to distrust, above all, what it was to be alone, was in an instant in a world of devils and dismay. Everything had changed, at every movement a strange rattling clatter accompanied him, on every side of him were flashing lights and thunderous noises; he ran a little way, stopped, then ran again, and

still, whether he ran or not, this horrible rattling thing accompanied him.

He was lost, and lost with a strangeness that threatened on every side of him some awful disaster. His tongue out, his eyes staring, he began frantically to run, and as he ran all the world laughed; they laughed and laughed and laughed, you might fancy that the houses were bending forward holding their sides with merriment, that the chimneys wagged their heads, that all the lights in shops and lamps shook their flames in chorus. He was frightened with a terror that only children in the dark and lost dogs know.

This awful thing that groaned and chattered with him as he went! Madness seized him. He was watched by a world too busied with its own kind purposes to stop and inquire; moreover, he was running swiftly now, crazily, insanely, the snow blinding him, the wind tugging at him, the tin can careering madly with him, agonized fear in his heart, blindness in his eyes, lost.

VII

When Mr. Hannaway reached the street the snow was falling fast. He was not quite himself; sometimes when he was very tired and when he had not eaten quite enough he was a little light-headed and saw things oddly. He saw things oddly now, the street seemed to run so sharply downhill that unless he took great care he would be tumbling off it into an abyss. At the heart of his light-headedness there was despair, he had reached the end of everything; worst of all was it that there was no one in the world who cared twopence about him. Mrs. Lane, the old woman who managed for him, might in her rough way

have some feeling for him, but she was always tried by him and irritated, whatever he did she was irritated; no, he could not say that there was a great deal of affection there. The parish in general put up with him, but they all, as he very well knew, thought him too old for his job. And that was the truth; he could see from this afternoon that the fault was entirely his. Everyone had been kind to him, had wanted to do him a service; it had been his own stupidity that had prevented them, but he did feel that if only someone or something without being deliberately kind at all could feel affection for him simply because they couldn't help it, then, old though he was, he might do wonderful things. But there was no hope any more, this afternoon had shown him that the only thing for him to do was to go away and hide himself and so obscurely die.

This light-headedness increased as he reached the more crowded streets. He was not far now from his home; snow bewildered him, driving into his eyes, and the wind tugged at his thin coat, piercing him with cold. The lights all began to dance before his eyes; people, strange people, hurrying people, hostile people, brushed against him and passed him. He seemed to be of an incredible lightness, so that in another moment he might be tossed into the air and blown like a leaf by the icy wind. There was a dreadful noise on every side of him, roaring and shouting and a strange rumbling at his feet. The houses were like cliffs and rocks, black and jagged, and it was as though he were fighting in a turbulent swiftly running stream whose fierce current he could not conquer.

Then, as though some black-faced giant bent down, he felt a tweak at his head and his old shabby black hat was gone. Everyone was battling with the snow and wind, he

seemed to see arms raised, legs lifted, skirts distended on all sides of him. He ran a little way after his hat, but he could not see it, only lights rolling like balls on every side from under his feet. He ran forward again and then did not seem to be able to stop from running. He was terrified by the loneliness, the darkness, and the sense that everything was swirling around him. Funny old man! Lost his hat! Lost his hat! Lost his hat! He was talking to himself, waving his arms. . . .

Everyone was shouting. Something was coming towards him, it ran right at him, leaped up, almost knocked him over; he clung to it as though it were his only safeguard. A strange silence and stillness fell.

VIII

So the two of them met, driven by the kind feeling of all the world into one another's arms. Mr. Hannaway, panting as though he had escaped some great disaster, looked around him; the dog, panting frantically, stayed at his feet. They were in actual fact in a small, rather dimly lighted street down whose dusky passage a blizzard of snow was now swirling. "Why, it's a dog!" said Mr. Hannaway, and as though these words were some kind of magical open sesame his brain cleared, his heart beat less madly, he saw and recognized the street as one not far from his own, and a curious tired placidity came and rested upon him. The dog never moved, only lay there panting its heart out.

He bent down and untied the tin can; then he picked up the dog and went home.

Mrs. Lane, coming in with the tea, saw him sitting in front of the fire wiping the dog with a towel. Dogs, like

children, if the tyranny has not been so long that it has entered into their souls, are swiftly reassured. The dog licked the back of Mr. Hannaway's old dry hand.

Now Mrs. Lane objected to dogs and, laying the tray on the table, she began: "Well, I never. . . ." Then a strange look in the old man's eyes stopped her. He was smiling with a pleasure that struck even her dimmed and hardened imagination. "Well, I never," she said again.

"Yes," he said, looking up at her and speaking timidly, "it's been a terrible afternoon, Mrs. Lane. Everyone's been as nice as possible and yet somehow they are not as kind as they mean to be. Why, they had actually tied a tin to this poor dog's tail. I know you don't like dogs, Mrs. Lane," he went on, smiling rather anxiously, "but I can't help it, this dog's going to stay."

"Well, I don't approve of dogs," she answered, "but I dare say we can find a place for him in the back. Not that it mightn't be kinder to send him away, but there, if it gives you pleasure . . . I wouldn't hurt a flea myself, as everyone who knows me will tell you, but I don't like dogs and I can't say I do. However, no unkindness intended. . . ." Then, as she went out of the room, "No unkindness intended, I'm sure, sir."

ECSTASY

YES, yes, it's interesting that you should ask me that; that sets me talking, because, after all, isn't it for any man or woman over fifty, that time of life when retrospect begins to take the place of anticipation, isn't it *the* interesting question? Whether, I mean, we've ever touched in all our experiences that top perfect ecstatic moment that, once proved, justifies the whole of life.

People might suppose that I had known a good many ecstatic moments; men think me a lucky dog, but upon my word, sometimes, lying awake at that awful hour of three in the morning, I wonder why they do. Twenty years of happy married life should be enough, I suppose, but it's odd now when I look back how the last eighteen years of it, delightful though they were, have blurred the excitement of the first two. You couldn't have found two more perfectly suited people than Frances and I, suited in every way, tastes, character, sense of humour, everything. And yet I wonder sometimes whether, if we hadn't quarrelled a bit, struggled, and even perhaps separated and then come together again there wouldn't be more now to look back upon. Ungrateful, very, but ecstasy—that's another matter. And then, as to work, I am considered a success, one of the few poets and critics who make money and are not despised by the highbrows; my

book on Coleridge is a standard work, I suppose, and there are poems of mine in all the anthologies; I have been able to start my children well in the world; my collection of water-colour drawings is famous; that Cumberland cottage of twenty years ago has become this house that we're in now; I have plenty of friends, excellent health. Did you see that pair of tramps this morning, the man with a hunched back, the woman with the sore eyes? You spoke of them as a miserable pair, you were very sorry for them. Is there such a difference between them and ourselves? You were worried badly yesterday by that twinge of lumbago, and last week that article on me in *The Fortnightly* irritated me for two days at least. Well, fleas for them, lumbago for you; beer at the Knucklebone for them, that Burgundy for you: who is the happier? definite happiness, I mean.

It seems to me to level up pretty completely. Oh, I'm not so foolish as to pretend that money and health and friends don't matter: of course they do; but it's something beyond that justifies life. If I can explain what I mean it is as though we were forever on the edge of a justification, as though we were always saying, "Yes, this is all very well, but if I could only push this a little in that direction and that a little in the other, I'd touch the real thing." Once would be enough, you know, you can't expect it to go on eternally; but it's like this spiritualism business—get one real ghost that nobody can deny and the thing is settled forever. So with your moment of ecstasy. Granted that even for half a minute you see what life is for, then for the rest of your days life is worth while. Everybody's had such moments, I suppose, only they forget them or mix them up with other moments. It isn't enough for a

moment to be simply perfect of its kind, it's got to be perfect of all the kinds together.

That was why you interested me when you asked me just now what had been the most perfect moment of my life, and that's why I'm talking; if I bore you, clear out and read a book. Now that you've set me on to it I'm going to recover it again.

When you look back it seems at first that there have been a number of times when you've tasted life at its very possible best, and then, as you look, the others fade away and leave you with one or, possibly, if you're marvellously lucky, with two or three. And often it's such a tiny thing, in externals, I mean. So is this, almost nothing at all, and yet it's by that half hour that I estimate life and know that it's a grand and magnificent affair. There are the other moments: the morning (I was twenty-two) that I got a letter from Henry Galleon, whom I had never met, praising my poem, "The Old Man Euripides," and then the evening at the theatre in the interval of the Gaiety piece when Frances told me that she loved me, our wedding night at Clovelly, when it rained without ceasing, and I lay awake in the early morning listening to the downpour and marvelling at my happiness, the evening when John was born, the day when I heard that I had won the Murray-Smith prize, our first trip to Egypt, when we arrived on a perfect morning and saw the gods of Abu-Simbel. And so on; there are a number of them, and I am grateful enough for them, but each of its kind, one kind only, although at the time one may have been deceived. I enjoy things, you know, and it doesn't take much to make me happy. When you look back you are not deceived, those moments are not enough in life, not enough to coun-

teract the disappointments, the pains and angers, failures and mean thoughts. So that I have only known ecstasy once, and although there is so little to tell, it may be that you've had some experience of your own as trivial as this and yet as marvellous.

It was years and years ago, when I was thirty or so and had been married for five years. We were as poor as possible, Frances and I, and had rented a little cottage three or four miles from here, over Derwentwater, off the Lake road. It's gone now; I showed you the place the other day. We had had a wonderful five years, but things were just beginning to get a little crisscross. You've been married yourself, and you know how it is after the first years that you begin to wonder whether something hasn't gone that you might, had you been clever, have kept. You don't realize that it is the universal experience; you put it down to your own personality and a little, to be honest, to hers. You wonder why sometimes you're peevish, when two or three years ago your character was so admirable; you are irritated by certain little tricks in yourself and by some mannerisms in her that you fancy she could so easily avoid. Then there's your work. At first it was so wonderful to tell her all about it, she seemed to understand so exactly what it was that you were after, you didn't mind her criticism, you wanted her to be honest, it was wonderful to have the companionship of a clear intelligent mind; but later you fancy that both in her praise and her blame she is prejudiced. She likes the things she likes because she is fond of you, and being fond of you she surely should understand the things she doesn't like. If she isn't sympathetic to your artistic weaknesses,

whoever is going to be? and if she's too sympathetic you feel that she's indulging you because she doesn't want to hurt your feelings.

And then there are the children. Wonderful to have them, you love them with all your being, but either they're with you too much or not enough. You like them to be around you when they're good, and develop as you want them to develop, but as they grow they show signs of a character that you would never yourself have chosen for them. Their mother sees them in a light that seems to you either too critical or too indulgent; you can't help wondering whether she is quite as wise about them as you expected her to be.

And then there's the poverty. It's all very well to talk about love in a cottage, and you both meant it quite sincerely when, at the beginning, you said that money didn't matter, but four or five years of just failing to make ends meet takes the edge off things. You have so frequently to talk about money, and the economies that seem wise to you are so often foolish to her. After all, all you want is to be fed and housed in the simplest possible way and then to be left alone, but that same feeding and housing worries her, you can't but feel, a great deal more than it honestly should. Then, although she never speaks of it, you suspect that she would like you to be a little more popular in your writing. Why not a play or a novel? Something that really makes money. One play that would take you two months to do, and who knows but that financially you're right for life!

And then there are the relations. Her mother's a dear and her sister's charming, but, after all, it is not their

business to criticize your life. And they know a side of her that in some odd way is unknown to yourself; they're always implying that you don't know her at all, a sort of patronage quite unconscious, of course, but nevertheless irritating.

And then there are the friends. She told you at first she was well aware that many men lost their friends when they married; that should not be your fate, all your friends were hers. But as it turns out, they're not; she says very little about them, but she cannot understand what you see in old John or Harry, and they are on their side less frank with you than they were, they suspect that you tell her everything, as, of course, you do, and they are jealous, too, a little, perhaps.

And so the edge is off things, and you wonder sometimes whether it has been worth while. Aren't you tied down and hemmed in and captured, and how are you going to deal with the next thirty or forty years?

I have never known how conscious was Frances of this gathering change. How can any man tell about any woman, or any one human being tell about any other, for the matter of that, and how especially can anyone tell when he is so conscious of his own change that he has little time left to notice the change in anyone else? In our egotism we take it for granted that the other is changing because we ourselves are. False nine times out of ten, and we know it.

And so there came this morning. I woke, I remember, to one of those pale shadowy days that everyone who "feels" the English Lakes loves so well. It was the beginning of a warm March, and the birds were singing in fine chorus beyond my window, but singing out of so ghostly and

faint a world that they seemed to have no life of their own, but to be the vocal part of that insubstantial air.

I came down to breakfast vaguely dissatisfied, and then, as so often happens, little things pushed themselves forward as though the whole world wanted me to lose my temper. There was a thin discomfort of neuralgia in the room, so impersonal that it was as though the books and pictures had it rather than myself. Frances came in, I remember, full of a kind of cheerful optimism that is the more irritating when you can see no possible reason for it. Then I was worried about a poem, I fancy; like every creator, I have been bothered all my life with a conviction that just round the corner there is the most marvellous word waiting for me to discover it. The irritating thing about this is that you feel as though this word is your own especial property and that it will wait there until the end of time until you find it. "Drat the thing," you say to yourself, "if it's so anxious for me to use it, why doesn't it take a step towards me?" But it won't, just hints to you that it's there, whispers in your ear, and then is off again, and you know that if only you could put your hand on it the trick is done, you can say *Nunc dimittis* and pass away. Sometimes you fancy you've got it, yes, up to the very last moment of complete revelation, and then you see that it is only imitation, and that the game of hide-and-seek is to go on as before.

I had lain awake early that morning, half in dreams and half out of them, and had had, it had seemed, the whole thing in my grasp. A marvellous poem! But I had not been asleep enough, no "Kubla Khan," alas, for me, and by breakfast time I had missed it altogether. Frances's amiable "It's going to be a lovely day" was exasperating,

I saw no chance of it whatever. Then, of course, the post was late. In those antediluvian days we depended upon an aged man on a bicycle who, as he passed through the village a mile below the cottage, greeted all his friends and relations with kindly words and exchanged histories with them. No use to hurry him, he listened to what you had to say, smiled in friendly fashion, and then was later than ever. No use to complain to the postmaster, who regarded it as a great favour that he should give you any letters at all. But this half hour, when the post ought to come and did not, shattered the morning into fragments. How can you create immortal things before you know whether in five minutes' time there will be more bills than you can ever pay, and perhaps one or two of those little letters that coil out of their envelopes like snakes and bite you almost before they're there?

So the post was late and, when it did come, extremely irritating. Frances had bought two hats in London and told me nothing about it, and here was the bill, but worse than that, there was a letter from Giles Linder asking me to lend him money. You may remember or you may not, Giles Linder; he is, I think, pretty well forgotten by now, but at that time he had made something of a reputation with his epic "The Colossus." He resembled "Festus" Bailey in that he had the habit of reissuing his epic every year with additions so that it swelled and swelled, and ultimately, of course, people were thoroughly tired of it. He had some real genius, I think, and the original "Colossus" contained some magnificent lines, but you can't expect people to go on buying an epic over and over again, although Linder did apparently expect just that. And because people didn't buy it, he was of course a misunder-

stood genius, and anything more exasperating than misunderstood genius I have yet to discover. He was not only misunderstood, but also desperately poor, and because he was a genius and because in his opinion geniuses were extremely rare, he felt it the duty of all the world to support him. He was older than I, and when I first came on the literary scene it had been wonderful to me to meet him; he was one of the first writers I ever knew. It had seemed at the beginning an honour to lend him money, although I, of course, never had very much of my own. I had thought even at first that he took my loans very much for granted, and he took them with exceeding patronage, regarding himself as so immensely above me that I was a lucky fellow, indeed, to be able to assist him. I became very tired of his long, lanky body, his pale bulging eyes, and peevish mouth; then as the years passed and "The Colossus" was read no longer, he could talk only about himself. Every time that he saw you, you were given to understand that when "The Colossus" appeared yet once again in a new dress, then you would see! The world would surrender at last, it had been a long time to wait, but genius was like that, and would I lend him twenty pounds?

Nothing could have been more exasperating than to receive just this morning this particular letter. You may say that it was easy for me simply and sweetly to refuse, but Linder *had* genius, and also no less than eight offspring. I used to be haunted by his silly face, and I did feel that he had something that I had not, but more than that, on this particular morning, as I looked at his sprawling, patronizing letter, I had an odd conviction that this appeal this time was a sort of test of myself. I had been generous enough in my early days, or if you think generous too

large a word, careless will do; if I had any money and someone wanted it, I liked to share it, but I had been conscious of late that I was growing mean. Some justification for it, perhaps, with a wife and two children and a very small income, but it was a deeper meanness than that. My generous arteries were hardening. It had been in my earlier days one of my pleasantest thoughts about myself that I would share my last crust with anybody, but now, not only with money but with almost everything, I wanted to keep things for myself, and Linder, who belonged to my old days—I felt as I looked at his letter that if I refused him it would be a definite step in a certain direction. If I refused him now, I would never give him anything again, and if I never gave him anything, there would be others who would also be refused; and so it would go on, tightening and narrowing. I saw it, I remember, quite clearly; this morning was a crisis, the events of it, however small they might seem, were in reality momentous; all of us were concerned, my wife, my children, myself, my work. As I looked at his beastly letter, his personality, so peevish, so patronizing, so clumsy, seemed to penetrate the room. There was something intensely pathetic about the fellow, something grand too in his obstinate refusal ever to bend himself towards the easier way. Damn it all, why will people be so mixed, and why, when it is all for your good to be persuaded of somebody's baser qualities, will the others keep breaking in? He wanted twenty pounds; I had had, a week or two before, a piece of unexpected luck; the twenty pounds were there waiting in the bank. If only this letter had come a month earlier I might, with good conscience, have refused him. I could see him standing opposite me watching me with that supercilious smile:

"Of course, my dear fellow, if you haven't got it, why, don't bother," and then definitely, with that refusal, he seemed to know that I had slipped one step further into the narrow dark chamber of selfish middle age.

Then Frances came in. She knew quite well that she oughtn't to interrupt me in the middle of my morning's work, but on this occasion she was excited because some silly woman had written to her and in her letter had told her that she had enjoyed immensely some poem of mine. If there is one thing in the literary life more irritating than another it is to be praised by people whose taste you despise. I don't think that this is altogether arrogance, it is possibly a kind of inverted humility. You feel a great apprehension; you say to yourself, "My God, if she likes my work it must be bad indeed!" Any praise makes one suspicious of one's self; only criticism is truly reassuring. I was irritated that Frances, who had known me so long, could understand me so little and fancy that this would please me.

And then she would go on; she should have seen in the first moment that the mere mention of Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Jones as an excited backer for me was humiliating, but she didn't. I told her; I said something like this: "For God's sake, shut up. I don't care what the wretched woman thinks; I'd much rather she disliked my work than liked it," and then Frances said something like this: "Why, you're becoming quite conceited," and I answered back, "That's exactly what I'm not. If anything in the world is going to make me humble it's that woman and others like her thinking my work good." Then Frances wore that obstinate look, the most irritating of all to a husband; you know it, when the wife says nothing, smiles, pretends

to be all amiability, hurries on to some other topic, and is repeating to herself all the time with self-satisfied pride, "I'm right, and you jolly well know it."

Then I went on: "Well, whether I'm conceited or not, I'd like to know how many more hats you're going to buy without telling me." This wasn't as a rule Frances's way, she was wonderfully good about bills, and in those days when we were so poor she watched every penny. It wasn't as though the hats had been very expensive either.

She was terribly distressed; she had meant to tell me, but she had forgotten. She had seen them in a window, and she didn't know what had possessed her, it was as though someone had forced her in, but she didn't want to excuse herself, it had been very very wrong of her; and while she talked I remembered certain private expeditions of my own, some first editions, a Browning manuscript, a Cotman drawing. I was ashamed of myself and so the more angry with her, and I did the stupidest thing in the world: I said nothing.

And meanwhile temper was rising everywhere, the room was full of it, all the furniture was indignant, whether at herself or at me I couldn't be sure. There was especially, I remember, an armchair near the fireplace that positively glared at both of us. I was beginning to lose my control, I wanted to do ridiculous childish things, I wanted to throw all the papers on my table into the air, take the books out of the shelves and throw them on to the floor, to hurl something at the window and see the glass go crashing into a thousand fragments. And all the time something was saying to me, "This is a crisis; lose your temper this morning and all kinds of things will happen, there will be no end to the consequences." Indeed, it is one of the

remarkable things about the life together of any two people that tiny means can produce irreparable results: a squabble about the cooking or a bill, and suddenly you are both launched into new and most perilous waters. You don't know where you are, you don't recognize one another, you say things you have often thought but have determined never to utter, and then, carried forward, you say things that you have never thought, untrue, dreadful, devastating things; you lust for revenge, you must wound at all costs, wound the more deeply because you love so deeply. Things once said have a dreadful habit of going on and on into endless time.

So this morning we were on the edge of anything. Who knows but that if it had gone the wrong way Frances and I might never have found one another again, so strange, so mysterious, so lonely are human beings, so sadly at the mercy of their meaner selves. But to control myself, without thinking of what I was doing, I wrote at my table, Frances, half tender, half defiant, standing there watching me. What I wrote I didn't know. I was quite busy for five minutes, then, looking around me as though I had come out of a sleep, I said, "Good heavens, I've given Linder that money." And so I had; I had written him a very polite letter saying that I was delighted to help him, that I hoped that he would come and stay some time, that I was looking forward eagerly for the next version of "The Colossus," and then I had actually taken my checkbook out of my hip pocket, written a check, and placed it inside the letter. I was just going to enclose it in an envelope. "Good heavens," I said again, "I have given him the money."

"What money?" she asked smiling.

Then at her smile I laughed. "It's the oddest thing," I said. "Linder, the poet, I had a letter from him this morning asking for twenty pounds. I was determined not to send it to him and now I have. I will tear the check up."

"No, don't," she said, "then I won't feel so bad about the hats."

"But I don't want to send it," I answered, "we can't afford it."

"Send it," she said.

I slipped the letter into the envelope and fastened it up.

Already, a long way off, I could feel the relief coming. We had turned into the right road instead of the wrong one by the merest chance, the silliest accident, but a long way off as though it were seven miles distant in Keswick I could feel happiness approaching me like a sunburst from the clouds that you can see dappling the distant plains, then slowly, elaborately moving in your direction.

Then the next thing happened. John, our boy, burst in (although he knew that he should not). "Oh," he cried, there's such a funny old man in the garden!"

I went out into the misty garden. In those days the cottage stood on a little raised ground from which there descended a winding path to the road. Leaning on the gate and looking up at us with a roguish smile was a stout old man in a very faded frock coat. It would be the right thing at this point to make the old man mystical and mysterious; there have been dozens of such old men in English and Irish fiction, old men with flowing white beards and strong voices who talk about the streams and the hills and vanish at a moment's notice into the clouds. This was not such an old man at all, he was a thorough old

rascal, and yet, so strongly does he stand out for me as a symbol of this wonderful moment in my life, that, upon my word, as I look back to him I find it hard to believe that he wasn't clothed in rainbow colours and had a large white cloud on his head. As a matter of fact there is almost nobody in my life whom I remember more vividly. His was the fat of a tall, strong man run terribly to seed, he was clothed in a very shabby frock coat and ragged trousers, and he wore on his head a dirty floppy black hat. Liquor was no stranger to him, as his nose betrayed. His face was an engaging mixture of slyness and cunning dishonesty, but his impudent smile was rather engaging. "Well, what do you want?" I asked him, and as I spoke to him I was conscious again of this strange distant happiness approaching like a sunlit cloud. He didn't apparently want very much, in fact a copper or two and something to eat would satisfy him, and also if I had an old pair of trousers he would be very grateful. But he didn't stop there. Oddly enough I had the impression that I had known him before, and he spoke to me as though he knew me intimately. As he talked about his hardships, the extraordinarily hard luck that always pursued him, the injustice of everyone and everything towards him, the way that things were always going wrong just when you would have supposed that they were going right, I had the strangest sense that it was myself that was talking to me. A catalogue of miscellaneous odds and ends seemed to gather around us, old clothes, doss houses of a very melancholy kind, mugs of beer, hayricks, London streets at night, dogs with kettles tied to their tails, slatternly women, and ever-watchful, ever-persecuting policemen. I had known all these, or if I hadn't known them it was

the merest chance that I had missed them; it was as though I were moved all the time to say to him, "Hurry on from these, you're only telling me what I know." His confidential manner as he leaned on the gate and leered at me was disgusting, but it was disgusting in just the same way that some of one's own confidences to one's self, confidences that one hopes no one dreams of one's having, are revolting. "Well, come along," I said. We walked up the crooked path to the lawn, and a comic figure he was with that slouching, shambling gait common to everyone who has been for a long period in conflict with the law. I began to feel extraordinarily jolly and filled with relief, the sort of relief one knows when one wakes up from a bad dream and finds that it hasn't been true. And as I followed him I felt more strongly than ever that it was myself that I was following, the self that I had suddenly been able to relieve myself of, something like Christian when he flung off his pack.

On the lawn were Frances and the two children and, most remarkably, they greeted the old man with delight. This was the more astonishing, because Frances had a deep horror of tramps; if there was one thing in her mind against the cottage and our life there, it was that it offered a dreadful temptation to tramps, and whenever I had to go away she lived in mortal fear until my return. John and Peter, the two boys, behaved to him as though he were a friendly dog just given to them as a companion. He stood and looked about him. "Well, you 'ave got a nice little place 'ere," he said, and suddenly I realized that that was true; it was as though for years I had not been able to make my mind up about the cottage, and that

now it was decided once and for all. I had a lovely little place and I was right to to be proud of it.

From our little lawn there was a beautiful view over Derwentwater; there was the lake framed by the trees of the park and beyond them a little collection of fields and cottages and woods, all toylike and of different colours, and behind these the hills, Blencathra and the shoulder of Skiddaw, not, of course, mountains by your Italian and Swiss standards, but all the more friendly and intimate because they were not unhuman giants, but near enough to you to take a beneficent interest in all that you did. While I looked beyond the lake the sun broke through the mist and the little toylike fields and cottages came out suddenly into bright burnished colours. The sun swept in and out of the mist, and the colours vanished and returned and vanished just as though someone were laying down coloured carpets one after another to see which would be best. The lake in the foreground was silver-gray and quite still. "Well, you 'ave got a nice little place," the nasty old man said again.

And then the silliest things happened: we all of us, Frances, myself, and the children seemed to be seized with a ridiculous, fantastic, unreasoning gaiety. The children danced about the lawn, or rather Peter, being only two and a half, tumbled and rolled, shaking with excitement. The old man showed no surprise at our behaviour, he seemed to think it quite natural, but he gently hinted that if we had any clothes or food in the place he would be grateful for small mercies. Then Frances excelled herself. Why, of course we had. "Come along to the kitchen," and the old man came along, and again I felt as though it was myself

who was going to be fed. Once in the cottage we certainly lost our heads; we pressed everything we could think of upon him. He sat down at the kitchen table and ate and drank as though there were no end to his appetite, which I am ready to believe was true. "You're in luck," he said to me, nodding with his mouth full, "to 'ave all this; you might 'ave been like myself, 'omeless." And so I might, and what was more, I seemed to feel that this very morning if I hadn't been careful I might have taken a turn which would have led me at the last into precisely his position. He seemed, as I looked at him eating, to grow more and more like my possible self. I am stouter, of course, now than I was then, but a little lack of soap, a little more beer, one or two yieldings to weaknesses of which I was then conscious, the pursuit of the law, and it was just this that I would become. I was eager now to do anything for him. I hurried upstairs and searched among my clothes. When anyone had asked me for old clothes I had always thought it difficult to discard things; it is true that I had given up an old suit, but who knows whether I might not want it again? It was quite a good suit still. I realized now, as I rummaged, how tightly I had been clinging of late to anything that I possessed, and yet I had fancied myself quite as generous as any other man. But now I found all sorts of things, shirts and pants and trousers, and piled them in my arms and came down with them eagerly into the kitchen as though I had just found a fortune.

The old man took everything without surprise and without excess of gratitude. He seemed to feel that he had every bit as much right to them as I had myself, and I am sure that he had. Frances made them into a parcel, and when

at last he had eaten and drunk to the human limit, we came out onto the lawn again. A beautiful scene. The sun had conquered, and the whole land was flooded with its glory; everything was so bright that it almost dazzled your eyes. One of the glories of the English Lakes is the sound of running water; down the face of the russet-coloured hill on which was our cottage, streams were always tumbling, but I had grown so used to them, I suppose, that I had lost their melody; now it came as new music whispering, chuckling, all in harmony with an irresistible rhythm of happiness and freedom. The lake was a glass of blue, and in it were reflected the purple shadows of the islands and the dark ebony shadows of the woods.

The old man, clutching his parcel and jingling in his pocket money that I had given him, bid us good-day in very nonchalant fashion. He was in no way grateful to us, he knew quite well that he had given us more than we had given him. So I watched one of my future selves slope down the road and vanish, thank God, forever out of sight. I turned to Frances and she to me; we saw one another again as when we first met, a truer vision than all the dimmed and unadjusted patterns that daily life had formed for us so often since.

I put my arm around her, and we stood listening to the streams bathed in the wonderful beauty of that morning. "Oh, let's keep this," she said, turning to me, "this is true."

"Yes, it's true," I answered her, "the only truth."

And we never lost it afterwards. Things, of course, were difficult and disappointing again and again, but we would sometimes say to one another, "Remember the dirty old man that ecstatic morning!" and often afterward, when

I would see her tired or plain or just commonplace because of so much daily contact, I would hear the old man as though he were whispering in my ear: "Well, you 'ave got a nice little place!"

The days that make us happy make us wise.

All about nothing, you see, or all about everything! I have a very virtuous aunt, and if I had told her this little story she would have said, "But of course! It was all because you gave that poor man a check." But it wasn't. Linder wrote and said that twenty pounds wasn't nearly enough, and he wondered how I could be so mean to an old friend, and that he would like fifty.

But he didn't get it.

A PICTURE

IT INTERESTED me just now to hear what you said about pictures. To you, obviously, pictures are one of two things: good investments or pegs to hang an argument on. I am not pretending to be superior to you over that, I have never understood myself why it should be considered disgraceful to look on a picture that you are buying as a decent investment; not if you look on it only as that, perhaps, but then you never do, no real picture buyer ever does. If he sees a print or an oil or a water colour that will go up, he thinks, later in value, he is moved, *ipso facto*, by the beauty of it. That may sound cynical, but value means beauty more often with most of us than we'd like to confess.

And then as to discussions about art, there are few things in my opinion more amusing and more futile too. As to the futility of it, consider the little collection that I've been showing you this evening—John, Orpen, Pryde, Nicholson, Newton, Crundall, and the more advanced ones, the Nashes, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Gertler—jumble all these names up in a hat and spot your winner. Contemporary work, how can you tell? I've collected these things simply because I like them and they are a constant unending joy to me, little scraps of beauty scattered up and down my little house. And maybe that's the best reason, the only reason, for owning a picture, because you like it. After which platitude I come to what I want to

say, that some pictures go far, far deeper than that, have an active, positive life of their own. If they take a liking to you they can save your life, and if they detest you they can ruin it. And that's no exaggeration. I'll tell you a little story.

Once upon a time there was a young man—well, if you want to know, it was myself—and I had just proposed to Miss Vanessa Scarlett and been accepted. Grand name, wasn't it? and it suited her wonderfully, she was like that, all flame and colour and fiery life.

I proposed to her one spring afternoon in a little street off Leicester Square. These little London streets on a spring afternoon can be magical: hawkers with barrows of flowers, daffodils and hyacinths and white lilac and tulips, magenta coloured, the air that pale soft dusty gold, so peculiarly London's, and a hush in the little street as though it had its finger on its lip. That is peculiarly London's, too. You don't get it in Paris or Berlin, where, if you're not among the main traffic, the streets are dead, nor in New York or Chicago, where it's rattle, rattle and scream, scream from morning to night.

But do what you will in London, pull down all its buildings, fill it with traffic until it doesn't know where to turn, it keeps its character unflinchingly, and the side streets and squares are pools of active quiet like a lake at evening, when the fish are leaping. Excuse me for being poetical, London always makes me so.

Well, then, it was in such a little street that I was accepted by Vanessa. I just said, "Do you love me?" and she said, "Yes," and I said, "Will you marry me?" and she said, "Yes" again and then jumped into a taxi before I could stop her, and was gone.

I hardly cared for a moment whether she were there or not. I walked, as every accepted lover walks, in a paradise of incredible happiness, and I walked really without knowing it straight into the Durham Galleries. I went in mechanically, I suppose, because I had been there so often before. These galleries had always exactly suited my taste; they were not very large, three little rooms, but their shows were all excellently varied, there was always some good reason for the pictures and sculpture there, but almost every school was represented at one time or another, from the rough ferocity of Epstein to the coloured fantasies of Rutherston and the gemlike pre-Raphaelite perfection of Southall.

I went in, and there, standing on a chair looking at me, was a small oil of Walter Sickert's. It represented two Italian women talking, one seated on a bed and the other leaning over the back of a chair. The one on the bed was worn and wasted with a hard life, but she had lost none of her vitality, in the pose of her head, in the sparkle of her eyes, she was as vigorous as only an Italian working woman can be.

It was a most *intimate* picture, in dull colours, the only relief a little pink shadow in the dress, but as I looked at it, I seemed to belong to those two women and they to me, yes, although I belonged now body and soul to Vanessa. And it had that wonderful power that everything of Sickert's has of suggesting so much more than it stated. It was a door, as every fine work of art ought to be, to many things far beyond the picture itself.

I asked its price and found it more than I could afford (Sickert, now in his older age, was beginning at last to come into his own). I didn't, of course, really take it in; I

could think of nothing but my good fortune, I was in a kind of dizzy delirium.

I won't bore you with a lover's ecstasies, there is nothing more tiresome to the onlooker; but the weeks that followed were strangely magnificent. That Vanessa with her red-gold hair, her body straight as a dart and slim as a flower, her vivacity, cleverness, humour, intelligence, that she should love me did seem to me an astonishing thing. I was nothing very remarkable, I need hardly tell you, a journalist, essayist, poet, with a decent income, good prospects, sound health, average looks. Behind my apparent self-confidence was a real diffidence, a sense that my position, nothing very remarkable, was a sort of fairy gold that might vanish at a touch, and that Vanessa should have chosen me out of so many other more brilliant people did seem to me astonishing.

For she was one of the most startling and remarkable people in the artistic and literary London of that time. It was not only her beauty, but her quickness of perception, her ability to enter into anything at a moment's notice, the impossibility, as it seemed, of her ever being bored or irritable or prosy; she *was* like a flame, going from house to house, from person to person, lighting us all up, making us all glad that we were alive.

She seemed to us all the more brilliant, perhaps, because she used to take around with her a girl who was her exact opposite, a silent, colourless, passive girl called Jane Porter. When you looked at Jane you at once thought how brilliant Vanessa was, and if you didn't naturally think it, Jane drew your attention to it. She adored Vanessa with an intense, quiet, but unchanging adoration. Yes, those were wonderful weeks. There was no

reason why we should not be married soon, I was making a good income, and Vanessa had some money of her own, but for some reason I hesitated. This almost-contact, this worshipping at ever so slight a distance, held an excitement for me that I didn't want to lose. I had always been a little cynical about marriage. Intimacy, isn't it a dangerous thing? Must one surrender that passionate love to steady-going day-by-day comradeship? I explained it to Vanessa, but she didn't feel it at all, she wanted to be married, nothing was going to change.

Sometimes I was a little puzzled by her, as one must always be when one comes into closer contact with somebody. She was marvellously good-tempered and was always willing to see the other point of view, and yet I fancied sometimes that when she gave in to me I lost her. It was as though I was only really in touch with her when she triumphantly had her own way; her colour, her splendour seemed to dim ever so slightly when she submitted.

Has there ever been a lover who, as the weeks pass, has not felt some faint tremor of anxiety and even fear? That adjusting of personalities is difficult. And, by Jove, it's hardly fair: why can't that delirium of happiness remain intact for a little while, for so short a time as it is? But again and again murmurous whispers of that other terrestrial life come stealing into your joy. It was not that anything about Vanessa was disappointing, only that certain things were strange.

I remember one evening, when we had been engaged for a few months or so, walking by myself under a dim-rayed moon on Chelsea Embankment and trying to define my trouble. It was not that I was afraid of losing her, but

rather that my personality was fighting its own subjection. She dominated me, of course—what poet in love with a beautiful woman is not dominated, and that willingly?—it was rather that some personality that was not mine seemed to be trying to persuade me to some criticism of Vanessa. It was as if, walking slowly in that strange milky glow, land and water alike insubstantial around me, some stranger leaned over my shoulder and whispered in my ear: "Take care, take care, beauty is blinding you." I was furious, I remember, with even a hint of any criticism, and turned on the stranger, rebuking him—but still he lingered at my ear.

All this time, in the excitement of my love I had forgotten my picture, and then one afternoon I went into the Durham Galleries with Vanessa to see a new show. It was a show, I remember, of one of the more advanced modernists, squares and cubes of vivid paint slapped down in patterns that were so bright and amusingly arranged that it didn't matter what the titles of the pictures were, Place de la Concorde, or Still Life, or Woman Bathing, it was all the same.

The first thing that I saw when I came in was that my picture was still there, standing up on its chair looking at me. I seemed at once to feel a reproach in the eyes of the two women as though they said, "We had thought you were coming again, we were disappointed."

And what a lovely thing! This time one had no doubt about it. As so often with that artist's work, it grew better and better with intimacy: you did not think of its school, of its period, of its influences, it was simply a true and beautiful picture. It was not like the pictures around it, gay and amusing and odd, nor was it like the water

colours in another show that we had that afternoon been seeing, pretty and old-fashioned and so close to nature as to be unnatural. It was lovely as art and lovely as a comment on life, and it needed no justification, no praise, no emphasis.

"Isn't that lovely?" I said to Vanessa, feeling sure that she would admire it.

She turned and looked at it.

"What a dull picture!" she said at once. "Why, there's no colour in it."

It was as though she had struck me a blow in the face; we had never discussed matters of art very much; she had a way of quick amusing judgments, summing things up with the lightest touch of adjustment as a butterfly settles on a flower. I had taken it for granted that we thought the same about most things; on looking back now I can see that up to this morning she hadn't thought as I did; she had kept silent, and I had been too deeply in love to notice. But now, if it wasn't as though she had slapped me, it *was* as though she had pulled the hair of those two women. And they were my friends, I could feel them wince.

To my own amazement I was suddenly hot in anger. "That a dull picture!" I cried so loudly that several people turned round to look at me. "Why, it's beautiful, it's perfect, if it had any more colour it would be wrong."

She looked at me smiling. "But I don't think so," she said lightly; "each to our own opinion, dear Simon."

We moved off, looking at the pictures, I, at least, acutely uncomfortable; it was our first quarrel, if you could dignify it by that name, and yet in a moment I was ashamed of myself. The childishness of my anger because she hadn't agreed with me! What was to become of our companion-

ship if we were to fight over every difference of opinion? Besides, it wasn't like me; if I believe in one thing in this world it is tolerance, and above all in things artistic. Are you not insulting the lovely thing by fighting over its body? Cry aloud your praise for all the world to hear and leave the others to their own judgments. Yes, I was thoroughly ashamed, and as we walked out into the showery streets, I put my arm through hers.

"Forgive me, darling," I said, "to lose my temper because you didn't like that picture, how childish!"

"Yes," she answered, laughing, withdrawing herself ever so slightly, "you were funny; I have never seen you like that before—quite a baby, Simon," and then, most naïvely, although I didn't mind calling myself childish I didn't like her doing so. After all, she had shown bad taste in not liking that picture and she didn't leave it alone.

"If I really thought you liked that thing, Simon," she said, "I'd begin to wonder at your taste."

"But I did like it," I answered irritably, "I haven't seen a picture for years I have liked so much."

She said nothing, and we walked on a little estranged.

Next day she was as adorable as ever. What use to recall now all those lovers' intimacies, those little things that scattered like flecks of sunlight about every step that we took together. She had the magical touch, colour was deeper, music was sweeter, laughter was richer when she was there. And it was not only I, lover that I was, who felt it; everyone knew it. "When Vanessa is there things are twice as good," was everybody's saying.

But now I did not forget the picture, those two women would not let me go again. I went in to see it so often that Cadby, the proprietor of the galleries, chaffed me

about it. "Why don't you buy it," he said, "if you're so keen about it?"

"It is sixty pounds, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, sixty," he said.

"Why on earth doesn't somebody else buy it?" I asked. "That sum would mean nothing to many men."

"Yes," he answered, "and it's a good speculation too, but it's too quiet for a lot of people."

The consciousness of it began to disturb me; I even dreamed of it one night and thought that I had hung it in my room. I saw the exact spot where it had hung, and I was pleased because it fitted in so pleasantly with my other pictures. I have never been an admirer of the one-picture, one-room fashion any more than I have ever wanted to have only one friend in my life, but if you have many pictures a deal of adjustment is necessary, and I remember in my dream that I wondered that my Venice, 1902, as the picture was called, blended so admirably with the Johns, the Prydes and Clausens. But why not? Those two women would fit in anywhere, so quiet and true and friendly were they.

When I woke I got up and went into my sitting room almost expecting to find the picture there, and was quite disappointed to see the John drawing in its place instead. From that moment, whenever I looked at the wall above the mantelpiece I was always disappointed. I tried one picture there after another, and at last I left it bare.

Another odd thing I noticed was that whenever I had been into the gallery to look at it I was for the first five minutes with Vanessa a little irritated, a trifle not myself. She seemed for an instant too brightly coloured; she loved to wear fine stuffs, crimsons and bronze and amber,

and sometimes at first sight of her I would feel as though she were all decoration, as though there was nothing inside the clothes, and then in another movement the brilliance of her personality would overwhelm me and I would sink into a cloud of sunny bliss.

I used to go into the gallery hoping that the picture would be no longer there, that somebody would have bought it. It seemed an insult that somebody shouldn't buy it, an insult to everyone's intelligence, and its presence spoiled all the shows for me, all the other pictures seemed a little garish and untrue. I told Cadby so; he laughed. "You're daft about that picture," he said.

And then, in an instant of time, in an instant of heady drunken determination, I bought it myself; I not only bought it, I paid him a check for it there and then. I carried it back in a taxi, and I was trembling with excitement, with a kind of dismay too; I couldn't in the least afford it, I was frightened at my audacity. I hurried into my room and hung it in the space above the mantelpiece. I sat and looked at it; I could have sworn that the two women nodded their heads at me. We shook hands, congratulating one another.

While I was looking at it Vanessa came in. "Well, how's everything?" she began gaily, then, seeing that I was embarrassed, said, "What's the matter?"

I pointed at the picture and looked, I fancy, both sheepish and embarrassed. She turned round and saw it.

"That!" she cried. "What's it doing here?"

"I've bought it," I answered.

"You've bought it! How much did you give for it?"

"Sixty pounds."

"Sixty pounds for that thing! You're mad!"

I didn't try to defend myself. "Well, there it is," I answered. "Let's go out and have some dinner."

She said nothing; we went out silently.

At this point of my story I can see the shrugs of almost any listener. "Anyone so crazy over a picture deserves all they get," I can hear them saying, and, "he can't have been in love with the girl at all. The young man's got an obsession, and not a very nice obsession either." But I'll give you all that you please on Vanessa's side: there was everything to be said for her and almost nothing to be said for me. The point about it, I think, was just this, that there was something really and truly the matter between us, and that I might have liked all the pictures in the world and she detested them, and no harm would have been done; but that is what I began by saying, a picture, if it cares for you enough, can show you something that you never yourself suspected.

Well, we sat that evening in a little restaurant in Sloane Square and made polite conversation. Vanessa was proud and unhappy too, I dare say; I noticed again on this evening, as I had noticed before, that her brilliance faded out of her, her flame died down. She sat there with drooping feathers. We made no allusion to the picture whatever.

The fight came two days later. We were having tea in my room. She, dressed in dark crimson with a sort of white ruff round her beautiful neck, lay back in my old deep chair, while I at her feet told her how I loved her.

"Yes," she said suddenly and very quietly, "if you love me there is just one thing for you to do: take back that picture and never let me see it again."

The picture had not been mentioned by us since that original hanging of it.

"Let's have this out," I answered, drawing away from her a little and looking at her. "Listen, Vanessa, I love that picture; I have never cared for any work of art before as I care for this; it means something personal to me. Call me absurd or not, as you like, these two women seem alive to me and to care for me as I care for them."

"Yes," she answered intensely, "you care for them more than you do for me."

"That's absurd," I answered hotly. "You're alive and I love you, and they——"

"Are not alive?" she asked.

I could not say, the words stuck in my throat. They were alive to me; no love for her, no loyalty, no passion could bring me to that lie. She pushed me aside as she sprang from the chair; she went up to the fireplace.

"If I were to slash the canvas finely they'd be alive!" she cried, and for a moment I thought that she meant to do it.

I sprang up after her and caught her by the shoulder; she tore herself away from me, and for a moment we faced one another in furious hatred.

"You think they're real!" she cried, "more real than me. I am fine for you to make love to, to stroke and to pet and to kiss, and then, when you've had that, you go to that picture for your real life. I hate it, dull ugly piece of paint. Well, you can choose, it's those two or myself—if you keep that picture you never see me again."

Ridiculous, absurd, two people who pretend to be fond of one another quarrelling about a picture; but who is there, looking back, can't discover something just as trivial and just as eloquent of some deep divergence? I am inclined to fancy now that for me those minutes of struggle

in my room were a crisis, perhaps, for both of us, one flashing moment in which we both saw things clearly.

But when she was gone how miserable I was! This was our first real break, and as always in a lovers' quarrel I felt that I could not endure life without the little things that the last weeks had made so precious to me, the notes, the expectation of her coming, the first sight of her as she turned the corner or mounted the stair, the things that we had done together, the concerts and the theatres and above all the absurd, ridiculous things, the ridings on omnibuses, the meals in obscure little restaurants, the funny people at whom we had laughed with that wonderful simultaneous laughter that only lovers know, the moments of ecstasy when no words were spoken, the little unexpected gifts, the sudden waking in the night and thinking of her and realizing that she was alive and that next day I would see her.

All these things to be surrendered for a picture! Absurd! I would take it back at once to the galleries and change it for something, anything. I moved to the wall to take it down, and I couldn't, I literally couldn't. It was as though I was unable to face that blank space again, and as though beyond that I was going to commit some act of impossible disloyalty, as though too I were being tempted to support the strong against the weak to throw in my lot with the big battalions.

Well, I conquered my foolishness, took the picture down, wrapped it up, and went off with it to the galleries. I was shamefaced enough when I showed it to Cadby: "Afraid it won't do in my place," I said; "too dark for my rooms." He thought me, I fancy, a poor sort of fool, and he wasn't overpleased; he had had that picture for

many weeks and been unable to sell it. However, he was good-natured, and there were a number of other things he wasn't selling very easily either. I looked at them. "I want something very bright," I said, "full of colour." He had put my picture on the chair again, but I wouldn't look at it. He took me downstairs and showed me around; there was a Clausen, a Charles Holmes Lake Country scene, two delightful Brabazon sketches, a Charles Conder rich with primrose and violet hues. I chose the Conder. I went home, hung it up, and went round to Vanessa.

In her own rooms, which were as bright as a bird of paradise, she always looked as though she lived in a caravan, as though she were on the move and would at any moment pack up her flimsy stuff and gilt boxes and artificial fruit and appear suddenly, as though she had travelled on a magic carpet, a thousand miles away. I liked her thus; I had a kind of pride, I suppose, because I had been able to attach to myself anything so brilliantly transient.

But on this evening I was filled with alarm and uneasiness. When I told her that I had taken the picture back she adored me; she was like a child who, having got what she wanted, would make up to the giver by every sort of affection for all the earlier quarrels and obstinacies. Yes, she adored me that night, and I forced my passion for her with an extravagance and an urgency that were almost melodramatic.

Her little friend Jane Porter came in, a mouse of a woman, the kind of girl you don't notice unless you're very bored and have no one else to talk to. Vanessa had told her of our quarrel (she told her everything, I fancy; she

was the kind of girl you would eternally trust), and now Vanessa told her also of her triumph.

"Beastly thing," she said, "absurd to have a quarrel about anything like that."

But Jane Porter looked at me. "I liked that picture," she said quietly, "I'm sorry you took it back."

Vanessa turned to her tempestuously. "Sorry he took it back! Then you're sorry that we're engaged, that we're going to be married, that we ever met!"

"No," she answered still looking at me, "you know I'm not sorry, but you were wrong, Vanessa, to make him take it back, and it was weak of him to do so."

I said nothing, I knew she was right, and I had my knowledge deep down in my subsconsciousness where not even I could see it.

We all three went out that evening to a music hall, and I remember that there were Chinese jugglers whom Vanessa admired extravagantly. I had drunk more than was good for me, and I was extravagant too. The golden balls that they tossed into the air glittered and spun, they were themselves all spangled gold, and they made a whirl of colour in the air, and in the midst of this colour their little dead white faces stared out with a sort of fatalistic sadness. I seemed to spin round with them, and something stared out of me too, something betrayed and false.

She couldn't love me enough that evening. She was close to me, all round me, part of me, and when I left her for my solitary rooms she seemed to go with me, dancing like a streak of flame down the dark street in front of me.

But when I got in I shut her out. The rooms were chill and devastatingly empty.

What kind of madness possessed me that night? I have

read and been told of many a man's obsession, but was there ever an obsession queerer than mine? I am ashamed to confess it, but that night, in a state half dream, half waking vision, I came again and again into the dark, cold sitting room to see whether the picture was there; at least, it was not the picture that I expected to find, but the two women themselves. I remember once being told by some novelist that some character that he had created had become to him so real that she pushed out of existence the people around him, and he seemed to live only in her company. It was something of that kind in the weeks that followed with myself and those two Italian women; it was not that I talked to them or discovered any more about their lives than I had known already, which was exactly nothing, but that they seemed to follow me, two shadows, with some urgent message that they must give me, and the message concerned, I was sure, Vanessa.

Vanessa, if before she had been enchanting and bewildering in her beauty, far more bewitching was she now. It seemed as though my giving up of that picture had determined her to give me everything of sweetness and kindness that she had in return. And yet always my unhappiness increased, now someone seemed forever whispering in my ear criticism of her, that she was theatrical, unstable, even, God forgive me, false. There was, I remember, at that time a Spanish dancer—Esteban something or other—who was appearing at one of the halls and was forever turning up at our Bohemian parties. He was, naturally enough, fascinated by Vanessa, her warm, lovely colouring, her vivacity and excitement were something that he did not find too often, I expect, in our stolid, chilly London.

It was when he and Vanessa were together that I felt

especially her unreality. It was not that I was jealous of him, I had no need to be: she would leave him, or indeed anybody else, at a moment's notice to come to me. Had I had any vision or discernment I would have marvelled at the self-sacrifice and unselfishness with which she would leave the most amusing parties, the gayest, merriest company, to spend long, dull hours with me.

Yes, because they were dull. Lying awake at night I would ask myself what had happened to me; I had not before been this grouchy, fault-finding, critical creature, but now everything that Vanessa did was wrong. Was it a kind of pique because I had been cheated of my picture? I flattered myself that it was something much deeper than this, that these two dark strange women had shown me something false and artificial in Vanessa's character, and that I could not now escape from this knowledge.

And yet all this time how I loved her! I was, God forgive me, making scenes continually because I loved her so dearly, and she took my petulance with the utmost patience and sweetness. I remember one evening when I made a scene with her before the whole of some studio party because of some dance or song or something in her that had seemed to me false and theatrical, and I'll swear to you that in the very midst of my absurdity I seemed to hear a dry, rather cynical woman's voice in my ear saying: "Don't you see how absurd it is? Will you marry her if she's like that?"

Well, as we all know, when a lover has the privilege of making scenes and is not pulled up sharply they grow with the indulgence of them; and so it was with me. Hating myself, loving her, yet I could not resist constant petulance, the frequent irritation of tiny things, the

mad effort to make of her something that she was not.

Yes, and there is an end to all things. One autumn evening, as we walked home from some restaurant, where I had scolded her for laughing too loudly or making some too dramatic gesture, she said very quietly, her arm linked in mine, "Simon, do you love me any longer?"

"Love you!" I answered. "I love you more every day that we are together."

"Yes," she said, "you think so, but it isn't myself that you love, it is the person that you think that I ought to be; you would like me to be like the women in that picture, quiet and gray."

I protested violently.

"Well, one more month——" she said.

"One more month?" I asked.

"Yes, the last chance for both of us," and then, standing on the stairs inside my door, she kissed me tenderly, pressing her hand for a moment against my cheek, then ran lightly away.

And the month that followed was like the months that had preceded. We were to be married in six weeks' time, but I could not learn wisdom. There was just that change in her that I wanted to make (ah, how like many another lover) and, that made, I could remain tranquilly with my perfect companion forever. And so I nagged and sulked and criticized, and she bore with me ever more patiently.

There came an evening when we went to some friend's house to dinner and danced afterwards; Esteban was there. She was very quiet that night, and stayed at my side as though she were afraid to let me out of her sight. I was triumphant; this, I thought, was how I would have her be. She, as usual, walked with me to my rooms and then

held me close to her as she said good-night. Her parting words I will always remember: "Dear Simon, how good you are and how stupid!" but she laughed as she said it and, leaving me, went with that quick, gay step that was so especially hers, always as though she were hastening off to some lovely festivity.

Next day I was busy with some difficult and urgent work; I didn't telephone to her as was my custom. I came back late from my paper, humming to myself as I quickly mounted the stairs, expecting to find a note from her as I generally did on the evening of a day when we had not met.

I switched on the lights; yes, there was the note, and in front of it, propped up against some books, as quiet and austere and beautiful as ever, was the picture!

I hurried forward and tore open the letter. It was short, and I shall never forget the least word of it.

DEAREST SIMON:

I have gone to Spain with Esteban; we are to be married as soon as possible. I have bought back this picture for you. Was it myself or you that these women criticized?

Always your friend and well-wisher,

VANESSA.

With a shock about my ears as though a thousand waters had broken in upon me, I stared at the picture, and then, looking at those two enigmatical faces, I knew with a sudden flash of humiliating discovery that it was not Vanessa's weakness that the two women in the picture had discovered, but my own.

And so I missed the only chance in my life that has been really worth while.

And yet I love that picture; you can see it hanging there opposite you.

OLD ELIZABETH—A PORTRAIT

THE Hargreaves lived at No. 4 Montpellier Square, Edinburgh. Mr. Hargreaves was a widower, and he had one son, Philip, aged thirty-two, and a daughter, Margaret, thirty. They were all three of them tall, big-boned, fair, and silent. Although they lived in Edinburgh they were not Scotch, but came from the English Lake District near Keswick, and although they were North Country people they had some of that reticence and reserve which an Englishman so often develops in Scotland, as though he had not forgotten that he was within the gates of his ancient enemies.

Mr. Hargreaves, whose business had been something to do with textiles, was now retired, and his two great interests in life were in prints and golf. To look at the big, broad-shouldered, sandy-haired man with the rather dour expressionless face and the big clumsy hands, you would never have supposed that he could look so tenderly upon his Lepères and Hadens when he took them out of their solander boxes, but he would say grimly that prints were his only weakness, and indeed it was hard to detect any other. His son and daughter were as dour as himself. The girl was tender-hearted enough, but her mother having died when she was only a small child, she had been brought up in the grim companionship of her two men folk, and had learned long ago that enthusiasm and emotion and

sentiment were weaknesses that didn't belong to the Hargreaves. Philip, the boy, was in some business connected with insurance, and you'd have said that that business was his god. He showed no symptoms of interest in anything else whatever. He spoke very little at any time, but when he did speak it was to the effect that the business was doing this, that, or the other, and if it did badly he just shut his mouth and looked like a graven image, and if it did well he went out and played golf with his father, although he cared very little for the game.

The house, like other houses, resembled the people who lived in it. It was thick and gray, standing at a corner of the square, beaten upon by all the winds of Edinburgh, and what winds those can be anyone who has stayed in Edinburgh for even a week will know. Within, the house was scrupulously neat, everything was in its place, no picture hung crooked on its cord, no rug turned up a friendly corner, no newspaper slipped to the floor and rested there in happy dishabille. On the walls hung some of Mr. Hargreaves' choicest prints, but even such charming intimate personal things as Whistler's Little Mast, or Rembrandt's Three Cottages, or Bone's Clare Market seemed to lose their personality in those rooms. The furniture was splendid and massive and impersonal; you never heard anyone singing in the house or laughing or crying, it was the abode of decorous, sensible, honest living into which the emotions dared not break.

Margaret Hargreaves, who was pretty in a fair, large, smooth way, and might have been married if men had not been afraid of her, approached more nearly to emotion in her attention to the servant question than in any other of her day-by-day experiences. It was no light matter to run

that house as it ought to be run, and everyone knows what modern servants are. Scottish servants are better than most, but they are independent of mind and body; the old ones are apt to be proud and haughty and intolerant of rebuke, and the young ones, as the world over to-day, want holidays and fun and constant change of occupation. They were accustomed to sober, honest, God-fearing families in Edinburgh, but also to Scottish humour and democratic good-fellowship. They found often enough that the Hargreaves' atmosphere of almost inhuman detachment was almost more than they could bear, and although the Hargreaves' wages were good and the work not over severe, they were always departing on one ground or another. Margaret could not understand why they would not stay, and the servants frequently themselves could not understand. They had excellent bedrooms, admirable food, and plenty of leisure, but they disliked Mr. Hargreaves senior's eye and the way that Mr. Hargreaves junior would brush past them as though they were chairs or tables.

Mr. Hargreaves sometimes complained to his daughter that he could not understand why it was that Margaret could not keep servants, and he would threaten to bring in a housekeeper, but, of course, he never did. He was proud of Margaret in his heart, but he would have been covered with shame had he allowed her to perceive it.

Old Elizabeth would never have entered the house had not Margaret on a certain occasion been in desperate difficulty. There was to be a little dinner party to some business friends, and of course the housemaid, irritated by some quick, sharp rebuke from Mr. Hargreaves, had left in a temper that very afternoon. Margaret, in despair,

had run round to the servants' agency in George Street with the hope of finding something temporary that would do. What she did find was Elizabeth. On the face of it Elizabeth was absurd. She was well over sixty, a little thin woman of no physique, and confessed at once, with a pathetic eagerness to be honest, that she was a little deaf. She looked a very decent old woman, sitting there in the agency, clad in rather faded black, and wearing an old-fashioned black hat that was a good deal too large for her small, wrinkled face. Margaret found to her surprise that she was English; what she was doing in Edinburgh she didn't explain; her last place had been at York. "I am very strong, mum," she said in a thin, bright voice that had something lively but distant and remote in it, like a note on a spinet. "You mightn't think it to look at me, but I am every bit as strong as I was thirty years ago; there's nothing wrong with me except my deafness, and I don't think you'll find that much of a trouble, because you've a nice clear voice, mum, if you don't mind my saying so." She was scrupulously clean, and if anyone in this world ever looked honest to the core she did. Her face, too, had a nice ruddy-brown colour that spoke of good health and good temper. She was trembling with eagerness to be engaged, and Margaret, who was in real truth soft-hearted and even a a little sentimental, engaged her. The little woman's face was all smiles. "I'm sure you'll be satisfied, miss," she said, having suddenly discovered, apparently, that Margaret was not married. "I'm not afraid of any amount of work, and I never fall sick."

"What are you doing up here in Edinburgh?" Margaret asked her.

The old wrinkled face saddened.

"My husband died six months ago here," she said. "I left my last place and came to be with him here; it seems to me more homelike now than anywhere else."

She went off to her lodging to fetch her things.

She could not be said to be a great success at the dinner that night. She was nervous, of course, and so eager to please that she confused the young parlourmaid, appeared at the door at the wrong moments, and was heard loudly to exclaim to herself on one occasion, "Dear, dear, I shouldn't have done that, I shouldn't have done that."

Mr. Hargreaves raised his eyebrows in ironic question to his daughter once or twice during the meal, and when the guests had gone Philip said to his sister, "My dear Margaret, where did you find that old scarecrow?"

Margaret, who had been worried by the evening, replied with more impatience than any Hargreaves was expected to show, "It's all very well, Philip, for you to talk, but if you had the running of this house you would be at your wits' end. It's more your and Father's fault than mine. Yes, Father, it's all very well to look at me like that, but why did you choose the very day we're giving a party to be rude to Alice?"

Mr. Hargreaves, standing in front of the fire with his hands in his pockets, answered quietly, "Rude to Alice, my dear—what do you mean?"

"Well, you know you were. You spoke to her about the hot water or something. She said your manner to her was most insulting. You know they won't stand it up here; it's easy to be polite to them."

Philip laughed. "If I were in their place," he said, "I would not bother about politeness. I would want a decent room to sleep in, good food, time to myself, decent wages,

and to be allowed to do my work in peace. If they don't get those things here, Margaret, then it's your fault."

"They *do* get them," she answered irritably, "but they're flesh and blood just as we are, and they want to be treated like human beings. It isn't a case of master and servant any more these days; we are all working together under the same roof at our different jobs. There is something inhuman about us," she burst out. "How many real friends do we ever make here? You've been here for years, Philip, and you haven't an intimate friend in the place."

Father and son looked at her with surprise; she was nearer tears than they had ever seen her before; there was a dangerous threat of emotion in the air; they were all frightened by it and avoided it skilfully.

That little conversation that evening marked something of a crisis in the family. They were not accustomed to thinking very much about one another, but after that evening they began considering one another furtively, and from that consideration Margaret at least passed thoughts about their life in Edinburgh and why it wasn't more satisfactory, why there were not more warmth and colour and friendship in it. The funny old woman now in the house had some effect on her. She was, of course, to be there but a week or two, until somebody else should be found, but this was quite plainly not her own idea. On the morning following the dinner party Margaret went up to Elizabeth's room to see that she had everything that she wanted and, in spite of herself, was touched by the things that Elizabeth had arranged there. On the chest of drawers, in a large, very ugly plush frame, was a photograph of Elizabeth's departed husband, the late Mr. Cummings. He was a neat, timid, pathetic-looking little

man in his photograph, staring forward anxiously as though he were begging the photographer not to be unkind to him. There was something very attractive about his face, Margaret thought; he looked a kind little old man, and Elizabeth must miss him very much. There were also a couple of large sea shells, a green plush box with a coloured photograph of Brighton in the middle of it, and a small photograph in a neat black frame of a thin wizened-looking little baby holding a toy horse.

"You see, mum," Elizabeth commented rather nervously, "I wanted to have a few of my things about me, and I do hope that you don't mind."

"Mind!" said Margaret gently. "No, of course not. Was that your husband?"

"Yes, it was," said Elizabeth, "or is, I should properly say, because he's up in heaven now looking just the same and a lot brighter than he was in those last weeks when he was so poorly."

"And was that your baby?" Margaret asked.

"Yes, miss." Elizabeth paused for a moment. "One year old and three days when it died. That's thirty years ago now, and I never had another. It was a sweet little thing, and my John was terribly set on it. He did love children, and was always running after his nephews and nieces. Well, well," she smiled brightly. "I've a lot to be thankful for, the Lord knows; things are always turning up, miss, in a way you wouldn't believe. There I was yesterday feeling rather down-hearted, I won't deny, and you come along and offer me a place that's just the sort of home I was looking for. Why, miss," she glanced proudly around her room, "I can settle down here perfectly; it reminds me more than any place I've been in

since of the room I had when I was quite a girl and was Lady Dunthorpe's maid. Of course, that was the old Lady Dunthorpe, she's been dead many a year, and the present Lady Dunthorpe's a bit flighty, they tell me; but there, one mustn't believe what one hears, and anyway I must be getting on with my work." And with a little smile of a confiding but entirely unpresuming kind she hurried off.

No, this was not at all what Margaret had intended. She had made it perfectly plain to the old thing when she engaged her that this was only to be a temporary affair until she found someone better suited. How could anyone so old and feeble as Elizabeth expect to do her duties efficiently? That was a house in which everything must be in perfect order, absolute punctuality was insisted on, and, of course, an old thing like that would be always late with everything, the stairs alone would be too much for her. But here came surprise number one. Elizabeth was punctuality in person: from the moment when she brought Mr. Hargreaves his morning tea at half-past seven to the carrying in of the whisky and soda water at ten o'clock in the evening, everything was up to time.

It was indeed like many other Edinburgh houses of the old type, a terrible place for stairs, a thin bony house with many floors. Elizabeth climbed them as though they were nothing at all, and if her knees ached she never said anything to anybody about it.

Surprise number two was that she got on astonishingly well with the other servants. Margaret had never before known such peace downstairs, and the other servants stayed as they had never done.

Surprise number three was a little more confusing in its results than the other two. This was that Elizabeth insisted

on considering the Hargreaves family as the most amiable, sentimental, and even emotional persons that she had ever yet encountered. When she had been with them several weeks she astonished Margaret by saying to her, "Do you know, Miss Margaret, what's the matter with your father?"

"Matter with my father?" repeated Margaret, astonished. "I didn't know anything was the matter with him, he's particularly well just now."

"Oh, I didn't mean his health, Miss Margaret," Elizabeth answered almost scornfully. "It's his good nature I'm meaning. He's always thinking of others, he can't see anyone unhappy without its upsetting him."

"He *is* very good-natured," agreed Margaret, who, loving her father, had yet never considered him in that light before.

"Why, only yesterday," continued Elizabeth, "I said something to him about Mary" (Mary was the parlour-maid) "and the bad dreams she keeps having, and he was terribly concerned. I wasn't thinking of worrying him about it, but he takes everybody's troubles as though they were his own."

She said to Philip one day, "Now, Mr. Philip, just you give me that other suit of clothes of yours, there's a spot or two I noticed. I know you don't want to give it to me lest you should be making extra trouble. You think of others too much, sir, if I may say so," and she confided to Margaret, "I do like to hear Mr. Philip's laugh. Indeed, miss, this is the most cheerful house I ever was in."

In any case, she stayed. Her busy little figure could be seen hurrying up and down the house at all hours of the day. It was true that she made mistakes, that she forgot

things, that she didn't always hear when she was spoken to, and in the very impetuosity of her good will went sometimes too far, but these things could be forgiven her; she had become an institution.

When she had been with them about three years she caught a bad cold. She was forced very much against her own wish to go to bed, and there she was for a week. This was terrible to her. She could be seen sitting up in bed, very neat and tidy, her gray hair parted, a shawl over her shoulders, large spectacles on the end of her nose, reading her Bible, but beneath this outward calm there was a desperate sense that the whole of the household was going to ruin without her, that the other servants were all over the place, and she would lie there straining her ears for sounds, hearing imaginary plates crash to the ground, and sniffing with terrible distress meals overcooked and all kinds of possible conflagrations. She pulled through and came downstairs again, but it was obvious to everyone that she was not as she had been. She was much deafer than before, she could not see very well in spite of her spectacles, and, do what she would, her knees failed her at the stairs. What a panic there must have been then in her old heart! This was her last place, and she knew it. She had not a penny in the whole world besides what she earned, she had not a friend anywhere, her relations had long forgotten her, she was prouder than Lucifer. She could not but know that she was now not up to her work; she must have risen on those cold, dark Edinburgh mornings with an agonizing fear lest some catastrophe should occur before the night. She was passionately eager that they should not discover her increasing deafness, she pretended to hear when she did not, and gave the most surprising

answers to unexpected questions. One day she dropped a valuable piece of china and broke it, and it seemed to her that the end of the world had come. On this occasion a surprising thing occurred. The parlourmaid, Mary, who was an ordinary, phlegmatic, not very imaginative girl, went to Margaret and said that she herself had broken it. Elizabeth, of course, instantly told the truth, and then went up to her room and, for the first time in the Hargraves' household, cried bitterly. Margaret, who had changed considerably during the last three years, did not not know what to do. How could they turn the old woman out? And yet things could not go on as they were. It was true that her father and brother had become quite fond of the old thing, but a servant was a servant to them, and Margaret perceived that her father was growing more and more irritated as the days passed and unpunctuality and disorder increased.

"Look here, Margaret," he said to his daughter one evening, "what are you going to do about your precious Elizabeth? She's past her work, doesn't hear a word I say; besides that, it's positive cruelty to force her up and down these stairs; she's got to go."

Margaret's heart sank. She was surprised at her own feeling, it was as though some sudden misfortune had happened to herself, it was as though she had to lose unexpectedly someone who was near and dear to her. She had not a great deal of imagination, but in a flash of vision she saw the house without Elizabeth, lacking some vital friendly quality that had come into it with her presence. That did not mean that she had not been irritated by Elizabeth over and over again, that she had not herself said many times lately, "Yes, she must go, she must go,

she's ruining the house." But when her father spoke it was as though the old woman had come into the room and stood there with her funny little body, her thin, hard-worked hands folded in front of her, and her old wrinkled face raised up beseechingly to hers.

"That's all very well, Father," she said, "I realize it as clearly as you, but what are we to do? She has no home, no friends, no money, she'll never get another place, she's proud and won't take charity, we can't turn her right adrift."

He frowned. "Well," he said, "things can't go on as they are."

Then, a week later, the catastrophe occurred.

One morning Mr. Hargreaves came abruptly out of his study and turned towards the staircase. At that very moment, by an unhappy chance, Elizabeth had rested for a moment a scuttle full of coals at the foot of the staircase. She was talking to herself: "Now, just a moment, my dear, and I'll have you up the stairs as right as rain"; but unfortunately Mr. Hargreaves ran straight into the coal scuttle, gave his leg a sharp and very unpleasant jar, and tumbled forward onto the staircase. He rose in a fury; nothing can rouse the temper more quickly than that sharp sudden pain of the shin bone. Elizabeth, not seeing exactly what had occurred, hurried forward with an "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" and he turned full upon her. "Do you see what you've done?" he shouted at her, pointing to the coals scattered on the carpet. "What do you go and leave a thing like that there for?" He was nursing his leg with one hand as he spoke; the pain was very sharp. "Didn't know you had left it there, I suppose! The fact is you're past your work and have been for a long time.

I'm afraid you'll have to leave us; you've done well, you are a good worker, and it isn't your fault that this house is too much for you. Miss Margaret will speak to you about it." And so he went hopping up the stairs.

The blow had fallen. She stood there gazing about her, then fell down on her knees and began in a fumbling sort of way to put some of the bigger pieces of coal back in the scuttle. A tear trickled down one cheek, and she brushed it impatiently with the back of her hand, leaving a smudgy mark of coal there. This was the end, the end of her life.

It need not have been the end had it not been for the Hargreaves character, which was such that as a thing was said so it remained. By the time he had reached the next floor the pain in his leg had greatly diminished and he was already repentant, but the matter was done; no Hargreaves could go back on his word. "I am very sorry, Margaret," he said five minutes later, "I've given your Elizabeth notice; couldn't stand her incompetence any longer. Deal with her generously, won't you." Deal with her generously! Here was one of those occasions when people who live together and love one another very dearly have a sudden impulse of real and almost passionate hatred. Treat her generously! The men of her family were hard, mean, grasping creatures; Margaret hated the lot of them. Again she felt as though some tragic loss had occurred in her own life; she would have gone, had years of training not prevented her, and put her arms round the old woman and kissed her.

But Elizabeth needed no sentimental pity. When Margaret spoke to her she looked at her bravely and said in a tone of almost casual matter-of-fact, "Your father is wrong, Miss Margaret, if he thinks I can't manage the work of

the house, but he knows what he wants and he must have his way. I shouldn't wonder if he wasn't thinking of me a little too, fancying that they stairs tires me more than they do."

"And what will you do, where will you go?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, I'm all right, Miss Margaret," Elizabeth answered quite gaily. "I've a little apartment I've been keeping with the things that I had when I was married. I'll be very comfortable, indeed, thank you, miss."

And so she went off in her black hat too big for her and with her shiny tin box, in which, of course, was the photo of Mr. Cummings deceased, the two sea shells, the plush present from Brighton, and the baby with the toy horse.

Margaret was unhappy and uneasy as she had never been before. The thought of Elizabeth would not let her rest. She seemed also to be on strange new terms with her brother and father; she felt that they had both of them been in this affair callous and unkind. They made no inquiries about the old woman, and her father offered no suggestion of helping her out with money. It was true that Elizabeth was proud, but still something might have been arranged. She was disappointed in her family, she knew that they were unsentimental and hated to show their feelings, but in this present case the old woman had seemed, Margaret thought, to pervade the whole house with her presence. She had fancied sometimes during these three years, fantastic as the idea might be, that old Elizabeth had affected her father and brother. Philip had fallen into the habit of laughing with the old woman, chaffing with her, and listening to her stories, and Margaret had thought on one or two occasions that she had heard

her father laughing in a way most unusual to him. And then that they should let her go without a word to absolute penury and friendlessness! No, Margaret was not proud of her men.

Very soon her conscience would not let her rest, and she hunted Elizabeth out. When she arrived at the room at last, down the hill in Leith Walk, she was agreeably surprised. The room was small, it was true, but it was very much better furnished than she had expected. There were cheerful things about, including, of course, the two sea shells and the plush box, and there was a large bowl filled with fresh flowers. Moreover, Elizabeth herself was in excellent spirits and looking very well. She was no more the servant, but a very independent old lady wearing a lace cap, her spectacles on the end of her nose, and a very handsome and certainly expensive white shawl over her shoulders. Margaret, in fact, felt to her surprise rather as though she had come to call on an elderly and very respectable relation. She sat down, refused tea, then most tactfully explained how glad she was to see Elizabeth so comfortable and asked her if there was anything more that she needed.

"Well, no, Miss Margaret," Elizabeth said, "I can't say that there is. I am very comfortable indeed, thank you. Of course, I missed the work at first, but there's a lot of knitting to be done, and I do my own little bits of shopping and such like, and I've a friend or two comes in to see me."

Margaret was surprised at that; she had thought that the old lady hadn't a friend in the place. She was altogether very greatly relieved; she did not feel now nearly so guilty. She stayed a long time; Elizabeth had so many

amusing stories of past days, former mistresses, pictures of an old world now dead and gone.

"I will come and see you next week," Margaret said, as she stood up to go. "Is there any day that you prefer?"

"Well, Thursday afternoon's a good day," Elizabeth said. "I've a friend comes to see me on Tuesdays, and Saturday's busy-like; come on Thursday, Miss Margaret, do."

She came on the following Thursday, and many Thursdays after that, and soon it became quite the regular thing for her to spend an hour there. She brought her flowers and things to eat, and Elizabeth was always delighted, but there was no sense at all of benefits conferred: the relation of mistress and servant was quite gone. Those weekly visits did the girl all the good in the world. She caught from old Elizabeth's spirit a sense of kindliness and good humour, of courage and optimism that was now become part of her own character. She looked at life differently, and soon somebody detected in her this new spirit, and new possibilities of fresh happiness opened in front of her. Old Elizabeth soon guessed this, asked her questions, and in a short time became her principal confidant.

All this time Margaret was puzzled by the things that she found in Elizabeth's room, by the comfort and ease of everything. The old lady must have been false in that at least; she must have saved in the past; there must be a stocking well filled in some corner.

Then one fine spring afternoon somebody asked a question, and Margaret answered it in the affirmative. Happy as she had never been in her life before and almost dizzy with her happiness she hurried round to Elizabeth to tell her. She opened the door without knocking and then stood

transfixed. There on a chair close to the old lady was seated her brother, reading the newspaper aloud, while Elizabeth sat there knitting, nodding her head once and again to what she heard.

"Philip!" Margaret cried.

He sprang to his feet, confused, blushing like a boy.

"But you," she exclaimed, moving into the room.

"I hadn't an idea."

"And you!" he answered laughing, dropping the paper.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

He mumbled something, then stammered, "Well, if you must know, I thought you'd laugh."

Elizabeth, very much at her ease, said looking up at them as though they were her own children, "Yes, and he's been coming once a week just as you have, Miss Margaret. He asked me not to say anything, and so of course I didn't. Very kind, he's been reading me the news, very kind indeed." She laughed at both of them.

Philip was quite sulky, he would scarcely speak a word to her on the way home, and she didn't tell him her own fine secret. Only he implored her again and again, "You won't tell Father, will you, Margaret? He'd think me such a fool, but she's a nice old woman; upon my soul, I'm getting quite fond of her, she's so amusing, got such a lot of funny stories—but you won't tell Father, will you?"

"And I suppose it's you who have been giving her all those fine things," she asked him.

"Oh, nothing very much," he answered, more confused than ever; "just once and again something I thought she'd like."

And there began between them from that moment an entirely new relationship. They wondered indeed that

they could have lived all those years together and known each other so little. There were so many things in Philip's character that Margaret had never suspected; they had jokes together now, and intimacies and secrets. Margaret's engagement was announced; her father gave his consent with a reluctance, with that same dry terror of emotion that always seemed to keep him apart from the rest of the world. He was most certainly a lonely man, and Margaret, now that she was going off into this splendid new life of her own, felt a great tenderness for him, a longing to get close to him, but she was afraid just as she had always been.

One stormy afternoon in the early autumn, when the rain was being driven round the gray corners by a proper Edinburgh wind, Margaret whispered to Philip, "What an awful afternoon! Let's go and see Elizabeth."

"All right," he whispered back to her, looking with a sort of humorous conspirator's air across at their father, who was at the other side of the room. "I can't be free till four, will it be all right then?"

"Perfectly," she said; "that will just suit me."

She fought her way through the rain, met her brother at the top of the Walk. They battled down the hill together, up the stairs, and with a cry of "Here we are again, Elizabeth," burst open the door. The door banged to behind them, and then they had to cling to one another to recover from their amazement. In that same chair that they both knew so well, looking as though he had spent the whole of his life there, reading the newspaper aloud just as they had both done, was their father. He had been caught, you would have supposed, in the very act of some terrible and heinous crime. He did not move, he only stared at them,

then jumped to his feet with an angry "Well, I'm damned!"

Elizabeth was entirely unmoved. She went on with her knitting, only remarking quietly to the world in general, "Well, it had to happen sometime, didn't it?" Then, turning to the confused man, "I told you you'd be found out, sir; it wasn't natural to keep it from your own children."

There was nothing to be said; he had been going there, of course, from the very beginning and been giving her things, reading to her, listening to her stories, laughing with her, enjoying himself, it may be, as he enjoyed himself nowhere else. No, there was nothing to be said.

Afterwards the three of them walked away together, and an odd walk home it was. It was of no use for him to put up the barriers again; he had been found out, and in his turn had discovered them also. They were all in the family guilty together. "Well, you see," he explained at dinner that night, "it was all my fault giving her notice like that. To tell you the truth, I got quite fond of the old thing while she was here. I suppose you think," turning round fiercely upon his son and daughter, "that I've got no natural feelings. Well, if you do, I dare say, it's my own fault. That old woman's got more sense of fun in her than all the rest of you put together."

They had the merriest evening of their lives upstairs that night. As Margaret was on her way to bed, along the silent passage she seemed to see a little figure flitting and a humorous, almost teasing little voice seemed to whisper in her ear, "You wanted showing to one another and there was nobody but myself to do it."

THE ETCHING

I

BUT can you always tell, do you think? That seems to me by far the most difficult thing. After all, when you are married you hide the truth from the general world—whatever it may be, whether it is too happy to be told—people think you conceited if you are very happy—or whether it is too unhappy to be confessed. A confession of failure? Who doesn't hide it if he can?

But that is not exactly what you mean. You were referring to that mysterious Balance of Power. That old overquoted French proverb, about there being always one who extends the cheek and the other who kisses it, expresses it exactly. And for the outsider it is just that that is so difficult to decide. Women especially are so deceptive. How many adoring wives would slit the throats of their husbands to-morrow could they be certain that they would escape detection, and how many submissive and apparently devoted husbands would poison their wives to-night had they the courage and the security?

I am not railing against marriage—oh, no. When it is happy it is happier than any other state the human being is capable of, but it does offer splendid mediums for safe hypocrisies. And the deepest and subtlest of all, of course, are the hypocrisies that deceive the hypocrites themselves.

Take, for instance, the Gabriels. Mrs. Gabriel was a

large, four-square, genial, red-faced, gray-haired woman with bright blue eyes and a hearty laugh. She was one of the sensible women of the world—"A rock of common sense" one of her many women friends called her. You felt that she had not always been thus, but had trained herself, through many difficult years, to self-control. You might guess that she still had a temper, and a pretty violent one, too. But no one ever saw it. She said that losing one's temper was a criminal waste of time.

She was rather like a man in her business sense, in her scorn of emotional trifles, in her comradeship with men, in her contempt for nerves. And she spoke to her husband just as one man speaks to another. "Shut up, Billy," she would say. "All that rot . . . you don't know what you're talking about," and Billy would say with a shy, deprecating smile: "All right, my dear, I'll shut up." And he invariably did.

Some friends of the family thought her a great deal too "bossy" to Billy, but so long as Billy did not mind, was it anyone else's business? And Billy did not mind. He simply adored her.

They had been married for fifteen years or more. They were the same age—something over forty. Billy Gabriel was the manager of the Westminster branch of the London and County Bank. Mrs. Gabriel had a little money of her own, and they had, alas, no children, so that they were quite comfortably circumstanced and lived in a nice roomy flat in Harley House, Marylebone.

About only two things had there ever been any words between them—about living in the country and about spending money.

Billy would have adored to live in the country. His ideal

happiness was to have a pleasant cottage—not *too* large and certainly not *too* small—somewhere not too far from London, but with a view (of hills, woods, and a stream), a garden and some dogs (Sealyhams preferred). He was a long, thin man with sandy hair, mild brown eyes, and a meditative mouth that often seemed about to break into a smile and then did not.

You would have said that he was a shy and timid man. You would have been nearly right—but not quite.

Their disputes over money occurred because, strangely enough, Mrs. Gabriel was inclined to be mean. I say "strangely" because it *was* odd that when she was so sensible about everything else she should be a little stupid about this.

It *is* stupid when you have plenty of means, no children, and another half who is in no kind of way extravagant that you should worry and complain about tram fares and seats in the dress circle. But Mrs. Gabriel had been brought up on very small rations indeed, and there is no one so seriously tempted to meanness as he who has had a penurious childhood and then made, or come into, money.

Nevertheless, all the friends of the Gabriels thought them a very happy and devoted couple. Of course he was by far fonder of her than she of him. Anyone could see that with half an eye. She should have married someone with more personality than Billy, and, good man as he was, there were times, you could see, when she found it very difficult to be patient with him. She was fond of him, yes, but rather as a mother is fond of a disappointing child who *will* be gauche and awkward in company.

Billy *was* shy and clumsy in company, but that was partly because Mrs. Billy made him so. She had begun in

the early days of their married life to correct him out of sheer love for him and his funny, silly little ways. He was so unpractical (outside his work at the bank, where he was the last word in method and accuracy), so dreamy and, sometimes, so untidy. And he *did* love to bore people with long, endless, wandering stories in which really they could not be expected to take an interest, and so she began by checking him when she saw that other people were becoming bored, and soon it was quite a habit with her. "Shut up, Billy. . . . All that rot. . . . Who wants to listen?"

And then he was so mild, she was so certain of his affection, he was so proud of her and submitted to her so readily, that she was encouraged to continue her "bossing." She ran him completely. She used to like to wonder what on earth he would ever do were she to go away or be ill. But she never went away (without him) and she was never ill (never gave in to illness. She did not believe in such weak pampering). She was like an elder brother—an elder brother who would wonder sometimes how so stupid and imperceptive a creature could have been born into the family. It was his imperceptions that called out her "managing ways" most frequently. The things that he did not see, the way that he idled his time, dreaming! How he would sit in the evening in their Harley Street flat just staring in front of him smoking his pipe, that smile so nearly there and never quite! Oh, it would irritate her sometimes, she must confess, when she was so busy, to see him sitting there and she would speak to him sharply and the dream would suddenly fade from his eyes and he would smile up at her (but not with the smile that was so nearly there and never quite) and hurry around and do some of the things that she told him. Oh! he adored her!—and she—

well, it was a pity for her that she had not married someone with a more remarkable personality.

II

Billy Gabriel was only half awake, and he knew it. It is very difficult to be fully awake when your work (and very interesting work too) takes up so much of your day (nine o'clock in the morning until six at night) and when, during the rest of the time, you have a wife who directs your every movement.

Dimly Billy remembered a time when he was not so directed. Oh, but very dimly! He would not say though that he was happier then than he was now. No, contrariwise. He was never tired of thinking to himself when he sat in the comfortable Harley Street sitting room smoking his pipe of an evening how fortunate he was. How fortunate that he, an ordinary unimportant kind of fellow with no especial talent for anything, no good looks, no clever talk, should have found a woman so splendid as Frances to care for him! That had been his first original impulse—a surprised, almost confused, choking gratitude. He had fallen quite naturally from that gratitude into subservience.

He was not as a rule a subservient man. He was not subservient at the bank, where the clerks were rather afraid of him, nor was he subservient at the "Twelve," a little dining club that met once a month, dined at Simpson's, and played dominoes afterwards. But he just worshipped Frances, and when she said that he was talking foolishly, why he *was* talking foolishly!

But was "worship" quite the word? He would have liked to think that out. One of the minor troubles of his very untroubled life was that he never quite had time to

think things out. One could not, of course, at the bank, think of anything but the bank's affairs, and then afterwards, in the evening, one was given scarcely time enough: one was just beginning to think when suddenly that rough, good-natured voice would cut across one's thought: "Now, Billy . . . sitting there with your mouth open dreaming again! Here, get up and help me with these books." And of course she was right. One must not sit there with one's mouth open, a habit easily tumbled into were there not a wife to correct one!

But there it was. There was never time to consider whether "*worship*" was the word. Probably it was not. "Worship" implied some kind of tingling breathless excitement, and certainly he felt no tingling breathless excitement when he thought of Frances. Gratitude and admiration, but excitement, no.

But, then, where were the married pair who, after fifteen years of life together, felt excitement about one another? Comradeship, comfort, compatibility—but excitement?

Nevertheless, he was aware that had he had time to think about it, he would have been certain that he was only half awake.

III

One November afternoon he had, at the bank, a very bad headache. So bad was it (he suffered from dyspepsia and had eaten unwisely the evening before) that he made a sudden and startling resolution. He would leave the bank an hour earlier than usual and take a walk. He had not done such a thing for years, and he felt quite shy (almost as though he were speaking to Frances) when he said to old Croffett:

"Croffett, I've got a head on this afternoon. I'll chuck it for to-day."

"Yes, sir?" said Croffett, putting his spectacles up his nose in a mild, comfortable way that he had. No one seemed to think it in any way peculiar, and, as he stepped out into the street, he wondered why he had not done it before.

When he had walked a little way his headache was very much better. He felt an almost schoolboyish sense of freedom and strode along humming to himself. He walked up Kingsway, turned to the left, and, after a little while, was outside Mudie's Library.

He stopped and looked in at the windows. He liked Mudie's, the books in those windows always looked cleaner and cheaper than the books in any other window. That was one of his ambitions—to have a library. He would never have one because Frances thought that buying books was an extravagance when you could subscribe to a lending library. But he liked to imagine the books that he would have and to stare in at the window and see how much he could buy for five pounds.

He moved up the street and soon was looking at the gray pile of the British Museum. He liked the British Museum. He had a national pride in it. One day, when he had time, he would spend a whole day there and see the Egyptian mummies and the Elgin Marbles. Meanwhile he liked to look at it and admire its strength and security.

To-day, turning aside, he saw suddenly a shop that he had never noticed before. It was a little shop with prints and drawings in the window, and there was something in the way that they were arranged that drew his attention. He went up and looked more closely and then discovered that to the right of the door there was a box and over the

box was a notice: "No print in this box more than Five Shillings."

Liking the comfortable shape of the shop, the way that the light from a neighbouring lamp post fell on a splendid chalk drawing of a gentleman in a ruff, the air of comfort and ease that the brightly flaming interior offered him, he stood idly turning over the prints in the box. Another of his ambitions—in addition to the cottage, the Sealyhams, and the library—was one day to have "pictures." Pictures in the vague, so vague and so impossible that he never breathed this particular ambition to anybody and for himself had scarcely formulated it. He only knew that they were to be real original pictures. Pictures touched, themselves, by the hand of the original artist. None of your copies, no, not even those "Medici" things that looked good enough until you'd had them a day or two, and then were lifeless and dull. No. . . . Suddenly his hand stopped. His heart thumped in his breast.

He was looking at a little landscape, a simple thing enough, a hill, a clump of trees, a cow, and a horseman. But how beautiful! How quiet and simple and true! And the real thing. Not a copy, although it was not a drawing. In the left-hand corner there was scribbled a name, "Everdingin."

He went into the shop. A stout, rubicund man came to him. He held up his prize.

"That etching. Five shillings. A nice Everdingin that. Cheap at the money."

Billy Gabriel paid his five shillings, his purchase was wrapped in paper, he left the shop. His heart was still beating. Why was he so strangely stirred? An etching, was it? Now what exactly *was* an etching? Was it a print? He

thought etchings were coloured. . . . Driven still by a mysterious sense of drama he stopped in a bookshop and bought a little book entitled: *Prints and Etchings: All About Them.*

Then he went home.

IV

He said nothing to Frances about all this. The china clock with the red flowers struck nine, and suddenly he murmured something and left the room. Frances was busy at the rickety but smart bright red wood writing table. She simply nodded without speaking. Then he crept across the passage as though he were afraid of something. He did not know that he was creeping. He opened the door of their bedroom and poked his head inside as though he were sure that he would find someone in there waiting for him. Of course there was nothing but darkness. He switched on the light, and suddenly there were the two beds side by side with the pink rose coverlets, there the table with the swinging glass and Frances' ivory-topped hairbrushes, there the tall wardrobe that always tippled forward a little as though it were listening, and there his case with his shaving things, the shabby, shy, humble friend.

He was strangely conscious that he was seeing everything for the first time. Nothing before had ever looked as it was looking now. Very odd. He was as deeply excited as though he had come there to meet some woman. He went to the table with the shabby green cloth near the window and picked up the two parcels. He unfolded the paper from the etching with the greatest care. Revealed, he placed it against a hideous purple flower vase. It stood there, softly, the hill, the trees, the cow, the horseman. Beautiful. So

still, so quiet. Breathing the evening air. He could hear the stream running, could feel the colours withdrawing from the sky leaving it chilly gray and pure. Soon dark would come and the stars sparkle above the trees and perhaps the moon would shyly appear.

He was lost in contemplation and did not hear the door open. Suddenly Frances's voice broke, scattering the stars, ruffling the stream.

"Why, Billy, what on earth are you doing in here? You ridiculous creature! I want you to come and find out those addresses for me. Why, what *have* you got there?"

She picked it up. It waved rather helplessly in the air as she looked at it from every corner.

"What an old mess! Wherever did you get it from? What a shabby old thing! Who gave it to you?"

"No one gave it to me. I bought it."

"You bought it? How much did you give for it?" Her voice was suddenly sharp as she put the etching down on the bed.

"Five shillings."

"Five shillings? For that! Why, it isn't worth twopence!"

He was surprised at his own anger. He was angry as he had never been in all his married life.

"Isn't it? That's all you know about it."

"Of course it isn't. Just like you to go dreaming along. I suppose you picked it out of some tuppenny box. As though we had money to throw away!"

And then suddenly she was indulgent. Her broad red-brown face wrinkled into smiles. "You silly old dear! What a baby you are! Why, I believe you're cross."

"No, I'm not." He looked sheepish.

"Yes, you are. Now confess. I can see it."

She went up to him and kissed him as a mother kisses a favourite child when the child after some little fault is forgiven. Many a time before had just this occurred, and he had always been happy at the little reconciliation, delighted at her generosity of soul. But to-night he was not delighted. He was still angry. She was treating him like a child. Scolding him for spending five shillings! After all, it was his money.

"It's a pretty good thing," he murmured, picking up the etching carefully and placing it once more against the purple vase, "if I can't spend five shillings without being hauled over the coals."

So astonished was she that she could only stare. Then she said:

"Why, Billy, I believe you really *are* angry."

"Yes, I am," he answered suddenly turning round and looking at her. "That's a beautiful thing. A *beautiful* thing. What do you know about prints? Nothing at all. You just show your ignorance, that's all."

"And what do you know about prints either, I should like to know?" she cried.

"I know more than you do, anyhow," he answered, "if you say that's only worth tuppence."

It became a vulgar wrangle. They were both ashamed and suddenly ceased. They went into the sitting room and sat silent. When they went to bed they made it up. But she lay awake, wondering what had happened to him, and he lay awake seeing the thing through the darkness—the trees, the hill, the horseman. It was as though he were recomforting it.

V

He knew in the morning that he was different and would never again be the same man as last night. It was as though he had fallen quite suddenly in love with a woman. But he did not analyze it. He only determined that he would keep it all secret from Frances.

Frances was instantly reassured. For so many years had she been able to manage him that it was not likely that there should be any change now. He was the same old Billy. He would be always the same. And she loved him. And despised him too.

Nevertheless, without knowing it, she did, through the next months, tighten the rein. Her dominance of him had been to her, increasingly, during all these years, a luxurious pleasure. Everyone fell in with it so completely. All her friends and all his adopted something of the same attitude to him—"Poor dear old Billy." Once, a number of years ago, a woman whom she knew but slightly had said to her: "You know you bully that husband of yours—and you'll be sorry one day." Bully him! When she loved him as she did! She laughed at the woman and was careful not to see her again.

Billy, as though he recognized how unpleasant their little squabble had been, was now very sweet and submissive. He gave in to her about everything. When her friends laughed at him he laughed too. Oh, indeed, yes!

Meanwhile he pursued secretly his new passion. His life was changed. He was happy as he had never been before. He bought six etchings—a Palmer, a Daubigny, a Legros, a Hollar, a Strang, and an Appian. None of them very expensive. The Strang cost the most—five pounds. But

then he had never spent anything on himself. Why should he not? There was plenty in the bank. Nevertheless, he hid the six etchings and the Everdingin with them. He hid them in the bottom drawer of the wardrobe, under his shirts. A poor place, but he had none better. He would go in, for a quarter of an hour, when Frances was engaged elsewhere, and look at them. He also bought five or six books, and read them with great attention. He subscribed to the *Print Collector's Quarterly* and hid also those numbers.

In the back of Frances' mind the little dispute remained. She would chaff him now, quite often, about "being an artist." She told other people, the Burnses and the Whimbleys, "Billy's taken up art . . ." and they all laughed.

In her heart she was not quite comfortable.

The trouble of a passion is that it does not stay where it should. It mounts and mounts, especially when it is starved. Had Billy been a millionaire and able to wander into Colnaghi's and request them to find for him a perfect Whistler "Venetian set" and all the green-paper Meryons in Europe his passion might have flagged—which is one reason perhaps why millionaires are not, as a rule, happy people. But he held himself in for a long while, had only his seven, and so his passion fed on starvation.

But it was more than that. Here was something for which all his life he had been waiting as the one man waits for the one woman. He had not known it, but it was so. The love of these things, their personality, the intimacy that he had with them, put him in touch with so much other beauty. He paid secret visits to the National Gallery, to the Tate, to the Wallace Collection. All these years had

he been in London, and how seldom had he been into these places!

He longed for the country— his cottage, his garden view, his rising hill and shining stream—so passionately, that once at night when he was lying in bed and the room was dark he stared in front of him, and it all suddenly arose there in its quiet and beauty as though he had it in his hand.

The six or seven books that he had bought had in them many pictures, and soon he felt that some of these lovely things were really his—The Spinning Woman of Ostade with the bird cage and the sleeping pig; the Meryon Morgue with its tier upon tier of watching windows, Corot's lovely Souvenir d'Italie with its shimmer of light and colour; Whistler's Rotherhithe, so strong and so delicate; best of all, perhaps, Van Dyck's Van Noort, the living, questing, animal, spiritual comrade; these and many, many another.

Then, as stage followed upon stage of experience, he spent an hour or two every Saturday afternoon in the British Museum Print Room. The luxury, the heavenly luxury of these hours when the stillness settled all about you and you had, actually in your possession, the Three Trees and the Notre Dame l'Abside and the Whistler Little Mast. When he must go he stood up and for a moment had to pull himself together before he moved, shifting from the one world into the other. What drunken happiness! . . .

Frances for a time noticed nothing. She was so sure of him, of his absolute fidelity of body, soul, and spirit, that it must be something very serious that could disturb her. Then she wondered. The Saturday afternoons troubled her. He was always late for tea now, and gave her such absurd

explanations, that he had missed a bus, been detained by an old friend, and so on. Then one night, lying awake, she heard him talk in his sleep: "Oh, you beauty! You beauty!" he cried.

In the morning she laughed at her fear, but the fear grew.

Then, on a day, she discovered in his drawer underneath the shirts the etchings, now ten in number. She drew them out, one after another, laid them upon the bed, looked at them curiously.

He had a secret, then. Whatever else might be true or false, this was certain—he was keeping something from her; he had been keeping something from her for many months. And if he was keeping one secret why not another?

About the things themselves she had no right to be angry, so unimportant were they, but they gave her the opportunity to exercise her loving tyranny. She loved him so much—and by now much more since these last days when she had begun to suspect him—that to see him bend to her, submit, to feel his complete subjection and her security of him was an unceasing joy. The more unhappy he was the more she loved him, knowing that soon she would forgive him and load him up with her affection. She saw all the course of the affair stretch like a shining path before her.

So when he came home she, icily calm, took him into the bedroom. In her heart she was smiling. She showed him the etchings laid out upon the bed.

A strange scene followed. He was unlike he had ever been. He was indifferent. He did not care that she should be angry. About what was she making all this fuss? It was true that he had bought these things and hidden them from her. He would have liked to hang them on the walls, but

what was he to do? She had made such a silly fuss about that first one that he had shown her that it was not likely that he would run the risk of such a scene again.

He did not look at her while he was speaking, but moved his hands restlessly as though he were waiting to protect the etchings against attack.

His indifference aroused her to a passion. She scolded and rated him, seeking always to see rise in him tenderness for her and love and gratitude. The moment that she saw those things her rage would die. She looked in his eyes, expecting. But they did not come. He hid his head and mut- that the money was his own. Was he never to have any freedom? He was not a child. They had money in the bank, plenty of it.

She flung away in a tempest of passion.

Later—but on this occasion not until a day had passed—they were reconciled. They kissed, tears filled her eyes, and as her hands touched his well-loved body and her cheek rubbed against his she adored him—as mother, as wife, as comrade. Nevertheless, five minutes later, she spoke to him sharply just to reassure herself that he was hers as he had always been. He answered her mildly enough, but she knew that he was not hers as he had always been. A new period in their married life had begun.

Now she was always trying to bring him back "to heel," and he was forever escaping her. It was the etchings that were responsible. How she hated them!

She thought of them lying there, in the drawer, under his shirts. She wanted to say to him—she knew that it was the wisest way—"Bring them out, Billy dear, let's hang them on the walls. Tell me about them. I will share this new interest with you."

But she could not do this, partly because he had found this new excitement without her and therefore she was jealous of it, partly because she was afraid that if she encouraged him he would spend much money upon them, partly because she felt herself no interest or pleasure in them. If she liked pictures at all she liked pictures with colour. Something gay. These were drab and dull.

And then she had her pride. She must lead. Billy might rule in his bank, but outside that he must follow her. So she said nothing and he said nothing, and she knew increasingly with every day that she was being deceived, and he knew that she knew.

More and more in public did she laugh at Billy's "love of art"—and more and more did the Burnses and Whimbleys laugh. Once she forced Billy to show his "silly etchings" to Mr. and Mrs. Whimbley, and how they all laughed! In another place and under another influence they might have admired, knowing nothing about the things anyway, but they always followed Frances Gabriel's lead. She was such a sensible woman. They followed her lead now. They laughed and laughed again. Billy smiled but said very little. Then he went and put them carefully away in the drawer.

And Frances, when the Whimbleys were gone, was ashamed and miserable and angry. Her hatred of the etchings was now a flame.

VI

Now she did not know herself. It was always nag, nag, nag. She must be at him forever about every little thing, about his clothes, his punctuality, his unpunctuality, the things that he wanted to do, the way that he ate, the way

that he did not eat—everything. And always she hated herself for doing it, wondered subconsciously *at* herself, saying to herself: "The moment that he looks at me with that old look of love and eagerness and wanting to be forgiven . . . That moment, I must have that moment. . . ." But he did not want to be forgiven. He submitted, he allowed her to lash him with her tongue, then to excuse him for faults that had never been committed, to make it up with him, to embrace him, then to lash him again. . . . But he did not ask to be forgiven.

Then suddenly, one spring evening, in a window in a little side-street shop, he saw Whistler's Balcony. A beautiful impression—he had by this time real knowledge—and cheap—one hundred and sixty pounds.

No, but the price did not matter. It was the thing itself. He had seen it before in Exhibitions, in the Leicester Galleries, at the British Museum, but this one was suddenly *his—his* absolutely as it looked at him out of the window, alive, begging to be taken by him, lovely beyond analysis with its strong arches, its deep water, its dark velvet-piled doorway, the gorgeous pageantry of the Balcony.

One hundred and sixty pounds. They could easily afford it. Only last week when discussing the possible purchase of a car he had said: "Well, that means two hundred pounds more," and Frances said: "Two hundred? What's that? We've got plenty in the bank."

They had. He had done very well since the war with his investments, and he had bought nothing—nothing really—for himself for years.

He went in and purchased it. He returned home with it under his arm as though paradise were shining on every side of him.

In his happiness he thought to himself: "I'll show it to Frances right away and insist that we frame it and put it up. If we do, it will make everything else look awful. Never mind. It's time we changed the furniture a bit. I'll have it out with Frances. She's bound to see how lovely this is. And so we'll make it up. It has been terrible these last months, all the quarrelling. . . ."

He went home singing. He went straight into the sitting room where she was writing letters at the bright red wood table.

He cried out in his happiest voice: "Here, Frances—see what I've got! Something you'll like!"

She turned, still sitting at the table. She had been missing him dreadfully all day, determining that when he came in she would be loving and kind to him and all the nightmare of the last months should be over. And now, to her own amazement, she said in a hard, hostile voice: "Well, what is it?"

She could see his face fall. Reluctantly now he undid the parcel. He held it up, dark and rich in its gleaming stiff mat. "Look," he cried.

It was an etching. She could have struck him in his face. It was as though he were deliberately taunting her.

"Another of those beastly things?" she said furiously.

His anger rose at once.

"If you can't see that that's beautiful it's just because you have no taste——"

She got up. "How much did you give for it?" she asked, her heart thumping so terribly with love and anger that she could scarcely speak.

"A hundred and sixty pounds," he answered, challenging.

"A hundred and sixty pounds?"

"Yes. And it's worth two hundred at least."

"A hundred and sixty——!"

"All right," he answered roughly, "if you don't like it you can lump it."

He left it lying on the table while he went out, brushing past her, to go into the bedroom to wash his hands.

He touched her as he passed, and that touch inflamed her from head to foot. With one movement she was at the table, then had the Whistler in her hands, then had torn it, again and again and again, into a hundred pieces. As soon as it was done and the pieces had fluttered to the floor she felt sick, sick with a ghastly, trembling anxiety. What had she done and why had she done it? What did she care about the etching or any of the etchings? What did they matter to her? It was Billy who mattered. Billy whom she loved with every atom of her body, soul, and spirit.

She could not move. She stood there, her knees trembling.

He came in. He walked to the table. In the first instant he did not realize. 'What——!' he cried. 'What——!' Then he was on his knees, fingering the fragments. Then on his feet he faced her with hatred in his eyes. He was going to strike her, then he stepped right back to the window.

"You're mad," he said, "mad. That's what you are. I've known it for months. You've killed that. It never did you any harm. It's murder. . . . By God, I'll not be with you in the house another five minutes. You're a murderess, that's what you are!"

She broke out then, crying, pleading, supplicating. He did not listen to her. He went out. She heard the bedroom door close. She waited. A kind of paralysis held her. She

could neither move nor speak. Ten minutes later she heard the bedroom door open and the hall door close.

Then, crying out, she ran, opened the door, looked at the lift, the gray descending stairs. The place was quiet as a well.

VII

He never came back. He did not want to. He simply wondered how it was that he had stood her so long and why it was that he had never discovered that he did not really love her. He took a charming cottage in the country, made a beautiful collection of etchings, grew fat, bullied his servants in an amiable kind of way, and was immensely happy.

She wrote again and again imploring him to return. Then she tried to see him. She never did. He gave her a very generous allowance.

She made the best of her life but missed him always. She longed for him sometimes so that it was like appendicitis or even a cancer. She will love him to the day of her death.

And why did he leave her? She can't think. She can't understand it at all. Some silly little quarrel about a drawing or a print.

All about nothing.

CHINESE HORSES

MISS HENRIETTA MAXWELL, when she was about thirty-five years of age, suffered suddenly from misfortune. She had been for many years quite alone in the world, an only child whose parents had been killed in a carriage accident when she was ten years of age. Then she had acquired an almost masculine independence and self-reliance. Until lately things had gone well with her. Without being rich, she had had, until that fatal August of 1914, quite enough to live upon. She had taken a house in St. John's Wood, not far from Lord's, with an adorable garden, panelled dining room, and a long music room at the back. She had soon loved this house so much, so deeply, that she had bought it. Then, when the war came, she threw herself completely into war work, nursed in France, worked with desperate seriousness and the severity of a brigadier general over those whom she commanded. Towards the end of 1917 she broke down, had insomnia, came back to England to rest, found it a much longer business than she had expected, and was not really her old self again until after the Armistice. Perhaps she would never be her old self again. Before the war she had not known what nerves were. Now she knew very well.

Then Miss Maxwell discovered that her finances were queer. In the first place it cost now twice as much to live as it had done before. Her little staff of three were loyal

and affectionate, but they had to be fed. Some investments into which she was led by a kindly but rather feckless friend had done anything but well. She was warm-hearted and hated to refuse the adorable spare bedroom to a friend, with the result that there was always someone coming or going. People dropped in for meals in the jolliest and most unexpected way. There was nothing that she loved so much as to hear people praise the house. Some of the praise she knew was insincere, but every now and then she heard that real catch in the throat, the "Oh, my dear, but it's lovely!" when the first glimpse was caught of the corner of the library with the long windows looking out onto the trees, the dark blue ceiling, the white bookshelves, the gold mirror, and the very best picture she had, a lovely Clausen: water-colour cottages, a silver-gray pool, and faintly blue hills. In her own heart of hearts she thought that nobody's books looked quite so perfect in their shelves as did hers. They seemed to like the room that they were in. They wanted to show her that they did, and there was so much sun in that library that their hearts were thoroughly warm, and some of the most cynical books in the world became quite amiable and kindly from living in that particular corner of that library. In fact, after reading Stendhal one winter very seriously, she moved him bag and baggage from the rather chilly corner by the door and put him in the sun-drenched spot near the window and hoped it would do him good.

She adored the house, every nook and cranny of it, from the basement, which ought to have been dark and was not, up to the two little rooms at the top, which were so hot in fine weather that nobody could sleep there and so cold in the winter that you had to wear a fur coat when you went

into them. But the house on the whole was of a fine temperature, and it had a way of always keeping one warm room on a cold day, and one really cool one in the height of the summer, so that it surprised you. In fact, it looked after you, and seemed to take the greatest care that it should have as few dilapidations as possible. Best of all was its colour. Miss Maxwell adored the colour. She said, what was true enough, that there were a great many gray days in London, and that you couldn't have too much orange, too much purple, and too many burning reds. That is not to say that she went in for all the eccentric colours of which people are so fond to-day, so that you do your dining room in black and orange, and for the first month it looks like the back-cloth of an Eastern musical comedy, and the second month it looks like the shop of a decorator who is not quite able to make both ends meet, and the third month it looks so shabby and dusty that you have to change all its colours and start over again. No, she was not eccentric. She had silver-gray wall papers and white bookcases. Then she had also certain things she had found abroad: some bronzes, two splendid Chinese horses, some Japanese prints, some Spanish shawls, and upstairs, in a little dressing room next her bedroom, a little collection of English pottery. All these things she adored with a personal individual adoration. She didn't understand the people to whom possession meant nothing at all. The Chinese horses and a Wedgwood bowl and two Jane Austen first editions and the Clausen picture were quite as personal to her as certain of her friends; a great deal more personal than most of her acquaintances. But all these things were sunk in the final adorable charm of the house itself. The house was her friend, her counsellor, her consoler in distress, her

doctor when she was ill, her companion when she couldn't sleep, someone who loved her and was intensely grateful for her own love. All this she felt when the horrible time came when she suddenly had to let the house and leave it because she couldn't afford to live there until times were better.

She was successful in her let; that is, she discovered a very pretty girl who loved the house at first sight, who was apparently quiet and orderly, who didn't keep dogs and didn't care for dancing (so she said). She was so pretty, this Miss March, that it really was charming to see her in the house. She was ready also to take on the little staff of three, and she told Miss Maxwell that she would be delighted to see her whenever she liked to call. The actual leaving the house, therefore, was not so terrible as Miss Maxwell had expected. It was horrible, of course, but Miss Maxwell went down to Eastbourne, sat beside the sea, and thought about that pretty creature moving in and out, up and down, and counted the months until things would be better, her investments would go up, and she would be able to go back again.

That was at first, but gradually, day by day, she felt more and more that the house was longing for her. She suddenly, on the wildest spur of the moment, when she was shopping and was intending to go back to her lodging and have her luncheon, took a train up to London instead, walked through the dusky afternoon to St. John's Wood, looked through the little gates, rang the bell, asked if Miss March were at home, was told by a severe-looking woman that she was not, and crept back to Eastbourne again. The sight of the severe-looking woman made things very much worse. What had happened to the dear little house-

parlourmaid who loved everything in the house quite as much as Miss Maxwell? This woman evidently loved noth- and nobody. She wrote to Miss March and received a rather stiff little letter in return saying that the staff had been added to, that one of the water pipes had burst, and that a sister of Miss March had caught a severe cold by sleeping in the little room under the roof. Miss Maxwell, feeling exactly as though she had had a daughter who had gone to her first ball and been found by a number of people to be plain and awkward, came up to London and saw Miss March. The girl didn't seem so pretty as she had been. She was discontented and pouted. St. John's Wood was such a long way from everywhere, and she did hope that she hadn't mislaid any of the books, but one never knew what a friend would do when one's back was turned, and it was strange how little conscience people had about books, anyway. Some strange people came in to tea while Miss Maxwell was there: loud, noisy people who cared nothing, Miss Maxwell was certain, for beautiful things, probably laughed at the Chinese horses and thought books were stuffy. The end of this was that Miss Maxwell took two little rooms just round the corner—poky little rooms with a slatternly landlady, but from their windows you had a view of the house, could look right into the garden, and even, if you hung out far enough, could see into the library. Here Miss Maxwell planted herself and waited.

We all know what obsessions can be, and there is nothing stranger in life than the very little distance that is needed to lend enchantment. Miss Maxwell had always adored her house, but seen as it was now, in fragments, with a coloured lawn, a brick wall, and several trees defending it, it was

magical. Try as she would, Miss Maxwell could not concentrate upon anything else. The house protested. Of course it did. It was reproaching Miss Maxwell every minute of its poor life for allowing it to fall into such unsympathetic hands. It could do nothing: it could only protest and wait for the day of its deliverance, and the best that Miss Maxwell could do was to wait as near to it as possible.

After a while, when summer came down upon London, and all the trees were rich and full, and flowers were scenting the byways of St. John's Wood, Miss Maxwell became afraid of her obsession. "You are really getting queer," she said to herself one evening, as she looked at herself in the glass, "and must look out or you will be doing something silly." What she had been doing that afternoon was practically to press her nose against the railings and look through a dusty laurel into the garden beyond. There, in the garden, very pretty in a pink summer frock, was Miss March, giving tea to a rather stout gentleman with a round face like a moon. Miss Maxwell, as she peered through, soon discovered two things—one that the gentleman with the moon face was rich, and another that he was in love with Miss March. She judged the first because of his clothes, his self-satisfied air, and his gestures, which were as though he was scattering gold upon the grass and didn't mind if the sparrows ran away with most of it. For the other, there could be no mistake. His eyes, as Miss Maxwell told herself, were liquid with love, and when Miss March very daintily gave him some sugar in his tea, he didn't look at the sugar at all, but only at Miss March, which in a gentleman who was quite obviously fond of his food was proof positive.

That evening, having a gay old woman to supper, she discussed the affair, and the first thing that the gay old woman said was: "Why, my dear, if he's rich and in love with that young woman, he'll soon propose to her, she will accept him, and then leave the house."

"Why should they leave the house?" asked Miss Maxwell, her heart beating fast at the mere idea.

"Why, you don't suppose," said the gay old woman, "that a man who's rich and fat will live in a poky little house in St. John's Wood! Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon," she went on; "of course, I don't mean 'poky.' Of course, it's a jewel of a house, but not the thing for married people, who will have motor cars and large dinner parties, possibly an aëroplane or two."

This idea was terrific. The one thought that Miss Maxwell had was that Miss March should leave the house. She didn't in the least mind at the moment who took it next. It might be herself. A rich old uncle in South Africa might die, or shares go up, or she herself might discover a new sort of radium, or the heavens might fall. The great thing was for Miss March to go.

"Do you think," said the gay old woman, "that he has proposed to her yet?"

"Oh, no," said Miss Maxwell. "The way she was giving him sugar proved that. If he had proposed, she would have been much less interested. I am quite sure that she wants him to propose."

"Well, then," said her friend, "if she wants him to propose, and he's in love with her, there you are, then."

The next stage in this story was that Miss Maxwell actually met and spoke to the stout gentleman. She was always hanging about the little leafy street that ran past

the gate of her house, and one afternoon, about six, the gentleman suddenly came out of the gate in a great hurry, his face rather flushed, ran straight into her, and nearly knocked her down. He was dreadfully distressed about this.

Miss Maxwell laughed in her frank, charming way.

"Harm? No, I should think not," she said. "I am very glad to have met you."

"Glad to have met me?" he stammered looking very foolish.

"Yes," she said, "because, as a matter of fact, that is my house. You have been going into it a great deal lately. I love it more than anything else on earth. I had to let it, but I simply hated doing it. I'm always wondering how it's getting on, and now you can tell me."

"How it's getting on?" he repeated. He was obviously one of those gentlemen to whom new ideas come rather slowly. "Why, it's all right, I think."

"Do you go into it much?" she asked.

They were by this time quite unconsciously walking down the road together.

"Do you go up to the very top of it and down to the very bottom of it? Are the Chinese horses all right? Of course, I ought to have put them away, and the Wedgwood and a lot of the books, but I simply couldn't bear that the house should be without them. I did send Jane Austen to the bank."

"Send Jane Austen to the bank?" he repeated. He was gazing at her with admiration. He was obviously a gentleman on whom the other sex made a strong appeal.

"Yes, my first editions of her. They are very good and worth a great deal of money, but they're worth much more

to me. Any amount of coin. You don't collect first editions, I suppose?"

"Well, no, not exactly," he said, stammering.

"How do you mean, 'not exactly'?" said Miss Maxwell sharply. "You either collect first editions or you don't. You can't do it half and half."

"No; I see what you mean," he answered, laughing. "That was stupid of me. But I am stupid."

She liked that. It was extraordinary how intimate you could become with some people in a very short time.

"You like Miss March very much, don't you?" she said.

"How do you know that?" he asked, blushing. He blushed very often.

"I saw you having tea with her on the lawn," she answered. "I looked through the railings."

"Yes, I do like her very much. She is very pretty. I'm thinking of asking her to be my wife. I want a wife," he went on confidentially, just as though he had said he wanted a new hat. "I'm forty-two and have been a widower for seven years, and every year it has been more and more difficult."

"What has?" she asked him.

"Being a widower," he answered.

"That's not a very good reason for marrying Miss March," she said.

"Oh, but I do like her immensely," he answered. "She's so pretty and kind!"

"Pretty she is," said Miss Maxwell. "What you have to ask yourself is as to whether she will be kind when she's hooked you. There's such a difference before and after."

"Hooked me?" He stopped. They were near St. John's Wood Road station. "What a horrible idea!"

"Well, of course she wants to marry you," said Miss Maxwell. "Very soon she'll not be as young as she is now, and you're rich, and I should think good-natured."

"How do you know so much about me?" he asked, staring at her in amazement.

"I'm observant," said Miss Maxwell.

"I should just think you are!" he said, looking at her, quite obviously ablaze with admiration.

"Tell me one thing," said Miss Maxwell. "If you propose to her and she marries you, will you live in this house?"

"I should think not. As it is, she says it's too small for her and miles away from anywhere."

"Too small for her and miles away from anywhere!" Miss Maxwell retorted indignantly. "She is no more worthy of that house than she is of you! However, I hope she'll marry you," she added.

On that they parted, and it was quite astonishing how often afterwards they met. And yet it was perhaps not altogether astonishing, for Miss Maxwell was so often in that road, and the gentleman, whose name was Mr. Herbert Willings, had reached that stage in courtship when very frequent visits are necessary. Moreover, he had that nature that demands a sympathetic friend. It was a delight to him, he confessed it frankly, to have someone to whom he could confide every stage of his courting progress. There was a little public garden round the corner, a very small one and a dusty, but it had in it a bench, and upon this bench Miss Maxwell and Mr. Willings used to sit, and he poured out to her his longings, his hopes, and asked her endless questions as to what she thought about Miss March's character. Because, after all, he was forty-two,

and behind his ardour was a natural middle-aged caution. He didn't, he confided to Miss Maxwell, want to make a mistake this time, from which she inferred that his first marriage had not been a complete success.

She herself was pulled in two opposite directions. She was as certain as she had ever been of anything that Miss March would make him very miserable. She had a kind of tenderness for him, he was so childish and so naïf, and she really didn't want him to be miserable for the rest of his days, as he undoubtedly would be if he married Miss March. On the other hand, it might be good for him to be less comfortable, less stout, and have to face for once the realities of life. And then she wanted him to marry, she wanted it terribly. She tried to make him understand a little what she felt about the house. She made him pay special visits to various rooms into which, it was quite evident, Miss March had not intended him to enter. She asked him all sorts of questions about the hang of the curtains whether the carpets were brushed, how many pieces of china had been broken, and he was caught once by Miss March counting the cups and saucers behind the glass case in her bedroom, and this, as he told Miss Maxwell, made her extremely angry. He had never seen Miss March angry before, and quite frankly he hadn't liked it. Miss Maxwell soon perceived that he would never have her feelings about the house. He simply didn't understand those things. A picture, if it had plenty of colour, wasn't bad on a wall, and a row of books, were they nicely bound, looked pleasant in a bookcase. He had to confess that he didn't read very much himself, but liked a good detective story when he was sleepy after a hard day's work. He thought the Chinese horses rather absurd, and treated her

to quite a long lecture on the Yellow Peril, and how just at present Europe was all in pieces. He was very serious about this, and stared at her in amazement when she said that if only the Yellow Peril brought her another pair of Chinese horses she wouldn't mind very much what happened to Europe. The weeks advanced, and at last the time arrived when he intended to propose. He asked her advice very often as to the proper time and place in which to make his venture. She told him that in her opinion nothing was better than tea time on the lawn, the shadows stealing across the grass, sparrows twittering, flowers sleepily closing their eyes, and plenty of little pink cakes on the table. And then as fate and the English climate would have it, the rain came down. Although it was July, it was as cold as December. Tea on the lawn was impossible, and a whole ten days went by when Mr. Willings had so nasty a cold that proposing was a physical impossibility. Then the fine day came.

Miss Maxwell knew very well that the day had arrived. When she saw the sun splashing across her carpet in the early morning, the first thing that she had said to herself, was, "Now he'll propose to her to-day."

They had come, without spoken word, to a kind of agreement that they would meet in the little dusty park on most fine days somewhere around five in the afternoon; that is to say, if she were free she would go, and if he were free he would go, without any very definite agreement, and it was surprising how often accident led them in the same direction.

To-day, on this perfectly lovely afternoon, about half-past five, she was sitting on the bench watching the sparrows and waiting with terrific emotion for his appearance.

She was sure that he would need a confidant, someone into whose sympathetic ear he could pour every word of the wonderful occasion. Had she a sympathetic ear? She was not so sure. She felt in some mysterious way guilty. They would not be happy together. There was not the least chance of it. Miss March would lead him such a dance as Miss Maxwell trembled to contemplate. But what did that matter, compared with the house? After all, it was their own affair and not hers. She was not their friend, or, at least, only very slightly. As she sat there she realized that what was happening on this wonderful afternoon was that the house was being given back to her. He must propose, and she must accept him, and they, being engaged, release the house. It was as simple as an easy sum in algebra. The house being released, in some way or another she would hold on to it. She couldn't see now in what way that would be, but never again, she swore, would she let it be delivered over to the mercies of an unsympathetic tenant. After all, she could live in one of the small rooms at the top of the house on bread and cheese, and open the other rooms one after another as her investments went up. She could feast her eyes on the Chinese horses, the darlings, and go over the house at night, touching the pictures with her hands, listening to every piece of furniture as it whispered to her "Good-night," see the ghostly gleam of the china, hear the faint rustle of the curtains against the half-open window.

There was a step. She looked up. There was Mr. Willings, more flushed in the face than usual, greatly agitated. He sat down beside her, and then, to her surprise, instead of bursting into a torrent of explanation, he said nothing.

"Well?" she broke in at last.

He still said nothing.

"Tell me that she's accepted you!" she cried. "And then give me all the details."

"She hasn't accepted me."

"She hasn't?"

"No."

"Good heavens, what a fool!" Miss Maxwell, in her agitation, turned full upon him. "You don't mean to tell me she's refused you? Why, it's exactly what she wants. She won't get such another chance in a hundred years. She's going off. She's got some money, of course, but not nearly enough, and you're so kind."

Her expressions were mixed, but her meaning was clear.

"She hasn't refused me."

"She hasn't refused you?"

"No."

"Nor accepted you?"

"No."

"Then she's going to wait and think it over?"

"No, not that either."

"Then—good heavens, Mr. Willings, tell me what you mean. I can't endure the suspense any longer."

"What I mean is simple enough."

His expression was almost sulky as he turned towards her.

"What I mean is that I haven't proposed."

Miss Maxwell was so bitterly disappointed that she could say nothing.

"I haven't proposed," he went on doggedly, "and I don't intend to. I'm never going to propose. I don't love her. I don't want her to be my wife."

Miss Maxwell rose bravely out of her disappointment. Curiosity held her again.

"You're not going to propose, and you don't love her? You loved her that day all right when I pressed my nose against the railings. I could see your love oozing out all over the lawn from behind miles of shrubbery. How can you change so quickly?"

"I might have loved her," he said, his face bright crimson, "if I hadn't run into you in the road; but you can't love two people at once, or I can't."

She was too utterly amazed to do anything but gasp.

"Why, man, you don't mean to say——?" she began.

"Yes, I do," he went on, staring at her. "I fell in love with you after the very first day, and it's gone on increasing ever since. How can a chit of a thing like that compare with you, with your wisdom and your kindness, and your fun, and—and—your beauty?"

"My beauty?" said Miss Maxwell.

"Yes, your beauty," he said, stammering in his agitation. "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. Your quiet gray eyes——"

"Oh, please, Mr. Willings!"

Miss Maxwell wanted to laugh, looked at the piteous, doglike expression in his large round eyes, and was touched with tenderness.

"Now do think for a moment. Here we are in a dusty little park in St. John's Wood, and we're both middle-aged, and nothing could make us romantic any longer. There is a beautiful young girl with all her life in front of her. I'm a withered old thing, and you know it in yourself. Besides, I'm in love with somebody else."

His face fell so it was tragic to see.

"In love with somebody else?"

"Yes, with my house. I can't think of anything or anybody but my house."

"Why, then, don't you see," he cried triumphantly, "you shall have your house. We'll turn that girl out of it, and you shall live in it for the rest of your days. You'll have to put up with me, of course, but I'll do my best not to be in the way."

They were both such charming people that a small sparrow who had been hopping about in a businesslike fashion on the path stopped for a moment and looked at them in sheer admiration, with his head on one side.

The dazzling vision blinded her. She didn't love him; no, not the least little bit. She looked at him, even in that moment of amazement, quite clearly and dispassionately, and saw how fat and bald he would be, even in another five years, and heard him snore in his sleep, and felt his heavy tread as he came towards her when she was tired and inquired solicitously whether she wanted anything, and saw the silly smile of happy satisfaction in his face when he bought her a new hat, and perceived precisely his air of touching proprietorship as he walked across a well-filled restaurant towards the table that he had so carefully chosen. She saw all this, but she saw on the other hand quite clearly a life of ease and affluence, no more struggles, no more watching your shares go down, no more wondering what she could do to get a new dress without paying for it, and, above all, the house, the house, the house—hers forever and ever. Yes, but his too. He didn't care for the house; he would pretend to, but he would never be able to hide it from her. Nevertheless, she was deeply touched.

"I can't tell you," she said, "what a compliment you've

paid me. We'll be friends always, won't we, whatever happens?"

His face fell directly.

"Oh, I know what it means when you say that," he said. "I don't want us to be friends. I want you to marry me."

"But I don't love you!"

"You will grow to care for me," he said. "I'm sure you will. I'll be ever so patient."

How many thousands upon thousands of people had said those very words before! How many thousands of people were probably saying those words at that very moment throughout the world!

She looked at him, looked away, said at last: "Give me a week. We won't meet for a week, nor write, nor anything at all. Be here this same time to-day week, rain or shine, and I will give you my answer, but remember, whatever my answer is, that I shall never forget how kind you have been. I shall always be grateful."

She got up then and left him.

There followed the most critical week of her life. She sat in her little room, looking over at the garden, and fought her severest battle. No one would ever propose to her again. Of that she was quite sure. There was very little prospect that, left alone by herself, life would ever become very easy. Life was not very easy any more to middle-aged women with small incomes and no talents. She would struggle and struggle and struggle, and later on perhaps ill-health would come. She would be alone in the world, and the grim finale was more than she, however brave she might be, could fully contemplate. He would always be kind, much too kind. She would dominate him utterly. He would do everything she told him. When she was cross

(and sometimes she was very cross indeed) he would be sorry and go out and buy her something and beg her pardon for some fault that she herself had committed. There would always be somebody to look after her. When she was ill there would be every attention. They would go abroad and see the world. Most of all, she would not only live in the house, but she would be able to do things to it, make it perfect and beautiful and wonderful, give it all the little attentions that it needed, help it and strengthen it and make it lovely, and at last die in it.

Yes, but he would be there. Every moment of their life together he would be misunderstanding the house. She would never, never be able to make him see it. However strongly she dominated him, she would never prevent his personality from pervading it, and the inevitable moment would surely come when she would implore him to leave it and probably find that the only thing to do was for them both to go and live somewhere else.

Common-sense readers of this little story will say at once that it is fantastically impossible. No middle-aged spinster with no future would surrender a comfortable, safe, and assured life for such a reason. It was not fantastic to Miss Maxwell. The beauty of that house was the test for her of all the beauty in the world, the only test, and it had to be kept pure and immaculate, and if it were not so, the colour of the world would change. Nothing would ever be quite immaculate again. That was a terrible week. She sat at her window, looking over at the house, struggling, thinking first one thing and then another. Then one evening, just the day before she was to meet him again, a marvellous thing happened. It was a lovely summer evening, with a half moon, crocus coloured, rising ever so gently

into the faint blue sky. She suddenly determined that she would go and see Miss March. She rang the bell and stood waiting, trembling with excitement. The horse-faced servant opened the door. Miss March was out. Might Miss Maxwell go just for a moment to the room at the top of the house and look for a little box that she had left there and forgotten? The servant hesitated and then yielded. Through the rooms Miss Maxwell went. They were soaked with the evening light, the light through which she loved most to see them. The whole house cried out with protest as she went. Ugly things lay everywhere, hideous new novels with bright yellow labels. In the dining room the remains of a horrible meal not yet cleared away. In the beautiful little blue-walled drawing room there was a loathsome Pekingese that whimpered at her like a child as she entered. And the bedroom—the mess that it was! Even the horse-faced servant felt something of this and said that it was wonderful how perpetually on the move Miss March had been, and what with dancing all night and entertaining people all day, it was a marvel that she kept her complexion as she did. In the little room at the top of the house there was desolation. No one had touched it for months. It was dusty and neglected and forlorn. Miss Maxwell looked out of the little attic window and saw the moon and the pale green sky, and the dark trees coming up to her like old friends from the dusky garden. She leaned out and forgot everything. Her hands pressed on the little wooden sill. Her eyes filled with repentant tears. She heard the servant's voice.

"I'm thinking Miss March won't be here much longer," the servant said. "She is considering giving up the rest of the lease, she tells me. It don't suit her. Too far out for 'er

friends. I'm sure I don't wonder," she ended with a sniff.

Miss Maxwell turned round, her heart beating with joy.

"'*Tis* too far out for her," she cried triumphantly. "It's not the house for her at all. She doesn't understand it."

The servant looked at Miss Maxwell with a stern pity.

"Maybe, miss," was all she said.

As they went downstairs, the house seemed to gather around them, and Miss Maxwell felt as though someone put a hand on her shoulder, and a voice whispered in her ear, "We're so glad you're coming back. We don't want anybody here but you."

On the following afternoon, Miss Maxwell refused Mr. Willings.

THE TARN

I

As Foster moved unconsciously across the room, bent towards the bookcase, and stood leaning forward a little, choosing now one book, now another, with his eye, his host, seeing the muscles of the back of his thin, scraggy neck stand out above his low flannel collar, thought of the ease with which he could squeeze that throat and the pleasure, the triumphant, lustful pleasure, that such an action would give him.

The low white-walled, white-ceilinged room was flooded with the mellow, kindly Lakeland sun. October is a wonderful month in the English Lakes, golden, rich, and perfumed, slow suns moving through apricot-tinted skies to ruby evening glories; the shadows lie then thick about that beautiful country, in dark purple patches, in long weblike patterns of silver gauze, in thick splashes of amber and gray. The clouds pass like galleons across the mountains, now veiling, now revealing, now descending with ghostlike armies to the very breast of the plains, suddenly rising to the softest of the blue skies and lying thin in lazy, languorous colour.

Fenwick's cottage looked across to low fells; on his right, seen through side windows, sprawled the hills above Ullswater.

Fenwick looked at Foster's back and felt suddenly sick,

so that he sat down, veiling his eyes for a moment with his hand. Foster had come up there, come all the way from London, to explain, to want to put things right. For how many years had he known Foster? Why, for twenty at least, and during all those years Foster had been forever determined to put things right with everybody. He could not bear to be disliked; he hated that anyone should think ill of him: he wanted everyone to be his friend. That was one reason, perhaps, why Foster had got on so well, had prospered so in his career; one reason, too, why Fenwick had not.

For Fenwick was the opposite of Foster in this. He did not want friends; he certainly did not care that people should like him—that is, people for whom, for one reason or another, he had contempt—and he had contempt for quite a number of people.

Fenwick looked at that long, thin, bending back and felt his knees tremble. Soon Foster would turn round and that high, reedy voice would pipe out something about the books. "What jolly books you have, Fenwick!" How many, many times in the long watches of the night when Fenwick could not sleep had he heard that pipe sounding close there—yes, in the very shadows of his bed! And how many times had Fenwick replied to it: "I hate you! You are the cause of my failure in life! You have been in my way always. Always, always, always! Patronizing and pretending, and in truth showing others what a poor thing you thought me, how great a failure, how conceited a fool! I know. You can hide nothing from me! I can hear you!"

For twenty years now Foster had been persistently in Fenwick's way. There had been that affair, so long ago

now, when Robins had wanted a sub-editor for his wonderful review, the *Parthenon*, and Fenwick had gone to see him and they had had a splendid talk. How magnificently Fenwick had talked that day, with what enthusiasm he had shown Robins (who was blinded by his own conceit, anyway) the kind of paper the *Parthenon* might be, how Robins had caught his own enthusiasm, how he had pushed his fat body about the room, crying: "Yes, yes, Fenwick—that's fine! That's fine indeed!"—and then how, after all, Foster had got that job.

The paper had only lived for a year or so, it is true, but the connection with it had brought Foster into prominence just as it might have brought Fenwick!

Then five years later there was Fenwick's novel, *The Bitter Aloe*—the novel upon which he had spent three years of blood-and-tears endeavour—and then, in the very same week of publication, Foster brings out *The Circus*, the novel that made his name, although Heaven knows the thing was poor enough sentimental trash. You may say that one novel cannot kill another—but can it not? Had not *The Circus* appeared, would not that group of London know-alls—that conceited, limited, ignorant, self-satisfied crowd, who nevertheless can do, by their talk, so much to affect a book's good or evil fortunes—have talked about *The Bitter Aloe* and so forced it into prominence? As it was, the book was stillborn and *The Circus* went on its prancing, triumphant way.

After that there had been many occasions—some small, some big—and always in one way or another that thin, scraggy body of Foster's was interfering with Fenwick's happiness.

The thing had become, of course, an obsession with

Fenwick. Hiding up there in the heart of the Lakes, with no friends, almost no company, and very little money, he was given too much to brooding over his failure. He *was* a failure, and it was not his own fault. How could it be his own fault with his talents and his brilliance? It was the fault of modern life and its lack of culture, the fault of the stupid material mess that made up the intelligence of human beings—and the fault of Foster.

Always Fenwick hoped that Foster would keep away from him. He did not know what he would not do did he see the man. And then one day to his amazement he received a telegram:

Passing through this way. May I stop with you Monday and Tuesday?—GILES FOSTER.

Fenwick could scarcely believe his eyes, and then—from curiosity, from cynical contempt, from some deeper, more mysterious motive that he dared not analyze—he had telegraphed "Come."

And here the man was. And he had come—would you believe it?—to "put things right." He had heard from Hamlin Eddis that Fenwick was hurt with him, had some kind of a grievance.

"I didn't like to feel that, old man, and so I thought I'd just stop by and have it out with you, see what the matter was and put it right."

Last night after supper Foster had tried to put it right. Eagerly, his eyes like a good dog's who is asking for a bone that he knows that he thoroughly deserves, he had held out his hand and asked Fenwick to say what was up.

Fenwick simply had said that nothing was up; Hamlin Eddis was a damned fool.

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that!" Foster had cried, springing up out of his chair and putting his hand on Fenwick's shoulder. "I'm glad of that, old man. I couldn't bear for us not to be friends. We've been friends so long."

Lord! how Fenwick hated him at that moment!

II

"What a jolly lot of books you have!" Foster turned round and looked at Fenwick with eager, gratified eyes. "Every book here is interesting! I like your arrangement of them too, and those open bookshelves—it always seems to me a shame to shut up books behind glass!"

Foster came forward and sat down quite close to his host. He even reached forward and laid his hand on his host's knee. "Look here! I'm mentioning it for the last time—positively! But I do want to make quite certain. There *is* nothing wrong between us, is there, old man? I know you assured me last night, but I just want——"

Fenwick looked at him and, surveying him, felt suddenly an exquisite pleasure of hatred. He liked the touch of the man's hand on his knee; he himself bent forward a little and, thinking how agreeable it would be to push Foster's eyes in, deep, deep into his head, crunching them, smashing them to purple, leaving the empty, staring, bloody sockets, said:

"Why, no. Of course not. I told you last night. What could there be?"

The hand gripped the knee a little more tightly.

"I *am* so glad! That's splendid! Splendid! I hope you won't think me ridiculous, but I've always had an affection for you ever since I can remember. I've always wanted to know you better. I've admired your talents so greatly.

That novel of yours—the—the—the one about the Aloe——"

"*The Bitter Aloe?*"

"Ah, yes, that was it. That was a splendid book. Pessimistic, of course, but still fine. It ought to have done better. I remember thinking so at the time."

"Yes, it ought to have done better."

"Your time will come, though. What I say is that good work always tells in the end."

"Yes, my time will come."

The thin, piping voice went on:

"Now, I've had more success than I deserved. Oh, yes, I have. You can't deny it. I'm not being falsely modest. I mean it. I've got some talent, of course, but not so much as people say. And you! Why, you've got so much more than they acknowledge. You have, old man. You have indeed. Only—I do hope you'll forgive my saying this—perhaps you haven't advanced quite as you might have done. Living up here, shut away here, closed in by all these mountains, in this wet climate—always raining—why, you're out of things! You don't see people, don't talk and discover what's really going on. Why, look at me!"

Fenwick turned round and looked at him.

"Now, I have half the year in London, where one gets the best of everything, best talk, best music, best plays, and then I'm three months abroad, Italy or Greece or somewhere, and then three months in the country. Now that's an ideal arrangement. You have everything that way.

"Italy or Greece or somewhere!"

Something turned in Fenwick's breast, grinding, grinding, grinding. How he had longed, oh, how passionately,

for just one week in Greece, two days in Sicily! Sometimes he had thought that he might run to it, but when it had come to the actual counting of the pennies—and now this fool, this fathead, this self-satisfied, conceited, patronizing——

He got up, looking out at the golden sun.

"What do you say to a walk?" he suggested. "The sun will last for a good hour yet."

III

As soon as the words were out of his lips he felt as though someone else had said them for him. He even turned half round to see whether anyone else were there. Ever since Foster's arrival on the evening before he had been conscious of this sensation. A walk? Why should he take Foster for a walk, show him his beloved country, point out those curves and lines and hollows, the broad silver shield of Ullswater, the cloudy purple hills hunched like blankets about the knees of some recumbent giant? Why? It was as though he had turned round to someone behind him and had said, "You have some further design in this."

They started out. The road sank abruptly to the lake, then the path ran between trees at the water's edge. Across the lake tones of bright yellow light, crocus hued, rode upon the blue. The hills were dark.

The very way that Foster walked bespoke the man. He was always a little ahead of you, pushing his long, thin body along with little eager jerks as though did he not hurry he would miss something that would be immensely to his advantage. He talked, throwing words over his shoulder to Fenwick as you throw crumbs of bread to a robin.

"Of course I was pleased. Who would not be? After all, it's a new prize. They've only been awarding it for a year or two, but it's gratifying—really gratifying—to secure it. When I opened the envelope and found the check there —well, you could have knocked me down with a feather. You could, indeed. Of course, a hundred pounds isn't much. But it's the honour——"

Whither were they going? Their destiny was as certain as though they had no free will. Free will? There is no free will. All is Fate. Fenwick suddenly laughed aloud.

Foster stopped.

"Why, what is it?"

"What's what?"

"You laughed."

"Something amused me."

Foster slipped his arm through Fenwick's.

"It *is* jolly to be walking alone together like this, arm-in-arm, friends. I'm a sentimental man, I won't deny it. What I say is that life is short and one must love one's fellow beings or where is one? You live too much alone, old man." He squeezed Fenwick's arm. "That's the truth of it."

It was torture, exquisite, heavenly torture. It was wonderful to feel that thin, bony arm pressing against his. Almost you could hear the beating of that other heart. Wonderful to feel that arm and the temptation to take it in your two hands and to bend it and twist it and then to hear the bones crack . . . crack . . . crack. . . . Wonderful to feel that temptation rise through one's body like boiling water and yet not to yield to it. For a moment Fenwick's hand touched Foster's. Then he drew himself apart.

"We're at the village. This is the hotel where they all

come in the summer. We turn off at the right here. I'll show you my tarn."

IV

"Your tarn?" asked Foster. "Forgive my ignorance, but what *is* a tarn exactly?"

"A tarn is a miniature lake, a pool of water lying in the lap of the hill. Very quiet, lovely, silent. Some of them are immensely deep."

"I should like to see that."

"It is some little distance—up a rough road. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit. I have long legs."

"Some of them are immensely deep—unfathomable—nobody has ever touched the bottom—but quiet, like glass, with shadows only——"

"Do you know, Fenwick, but I have always been afraid of water—I've never learned to swim. I'm afraid to go out of my depth. Isn't that ridiculous? But it is all because of my private school, years ago, when I was a small boy, some big fellows took me and held me with my head under the water and nearly drowned me. They did indeed. They went further than they meant to. I can see their faces."

Fenwick considered this. The picture leaped to his mind. He could see the boys—large, strong fellows, probably—and this little skinny thing like a frog, their thick hands about his throat, his legs like gray sticks kicking out of the water, their laughter, their sudden sense that something was wrong, the skinny body all flaccid and still——

He drew a deep breath.

Foster was walking beside him now, not ahead of him, as though he were a little afraid and needed reassurance.

Indeed, the scene had changed. Before and behind them stretched the uphill path, loose with shale and stones. On their right, on a ridge at the foot of the hill, were some quarries, almost deserted, but the more melancholy in the fading afternoon because a little work still continued there, faint sounds came from the gaunt listening chimneys, a stream of water ran and tumbled angrily into a pool below, once and again a black silhouette, like a question mark, appeared against the darkening hill.

It was a little steep here, and Foster puffed and blew.

Fenwick hated him the more for that. So thin and spare, and still he could not keep in condition! They stumbled, keeping below the quarry, on the edge of the running water, now green, now a dirty white-gray, pushing their way along the side of the hill.

Their faces were set now towards Helvellyn. It rounded the cup of hills closing in the base and then sprawling to the right.

"There's the tarn!" Fenwick exclaimed—and then added, "The sun's not lasting as long as I had expected. It's growing dark already."

Foster stumbled and caught Fenwick's arm.

"This twilight makes the hills look strange—like living men. I can scarcely see my way."

"We're alone here," Fenwick answered. "Don't you feel the stillness? The men will have left the quarry now and gone home. There is no one in all this place but ourselves. If you watch you will see a strange green light steal down over the hills. It lasts but for a moment, and then it is dark.

"Ah, here is my tarn. Do you know how I love this place,

Foster? It seems to belong especially to me, just as much as all your work and your glory and fame and success seem to belong to you. I have this and you have that. Perhaps, in the end, we are even after all. Yes. . . .

"But I feel as though that piece of water belonged to me and I to it, and as though we should never be separated —yes. . . . Isn't it black?

"It is one of the deep ones. No one has ever sounded it. Only Helvellyn knows, and one day I fancy that it will take me, too, into its confidence. Will whisper its secrets——"

Foster sneezed.

"Very nice. Very beautiful, Fenwick. I like your tarn. Charming. And now let's turn back. That is a difficult walk beneath the quarry. It's chilly, too."

"Do you see that little jetty there?" Fenwick led Foster by the arm. "Someone built that out into the water. He had a boat there, I suppose. Come and look down. From the end of the little jetty it looks so deep, and the mountains seem to close round."

Fenwick took Foster's arm and led him to the end of the jetty. Indeed the water looked deep here. Deep and very black. Foster peered down, then he looked up at the hills that did indeed seem to have gathered close around him. He sneezed again.

"I've caught a cold, I am afraid. Let's turn homewards, Fenwick, or we shall never find our way."

"Home, then," said Fenwick, and his hands closed about the thin, scraggy neck. For the instant the head half turned and two startled, strangely childish eyes stared; then, with a push that was ludicrously simple, the body was impelled forward, there was a sharp cry, a splash, a stir

of something white against the swiftly gathering dusk, again and then again, then far-spreading ripples, then silence.

V

The silence extended. Having enwrapped the tarn, it spread as though with finger on lip to the already quiescent hills. Fenwick shared in the silence. He luxuriated in it. He did not move at all. He stood there looking upon the inky water of the tarn, his arms folded, a man lost in intensest thought. But he was not thinking. He was only conscious of a warm luxurious relief, a sensuous feeling that was not thought at all.

Foster was gone—that tiresome, prating, conceited, self-satisfied fool! Gone, never to return. The tarn assured him of that. It stared back into Fenwick's face approvingly as though it said: "You have done well—a clean and necessary job. We have done it together, you and I. I am proud of you."

He was proud of himself. At last he had done something definite with his life. Thought, eager, active thought, was beginning now to flood his brain. For all these years he had hung around in this place doing nothing but cherish grievances, weak, backboneless—now at last there was action. He drew himself up and looked at the hills. He was proud—and he was cold. He was shivering. He turned up the collar of his coat. Yes, there was the faint green light that always lingered in the shadows of the hills for a brief moment before darkness came. It was growing late. He had better return.

Shivering now so that his teeth chattered, he started off down the path, and then was aware that he did not wish to

leave the tarn. The tarn was friendly; the only friend he had in all the world. As he stumbled along in the dark, this sense of loneliness grew. He was going home to an empty house. There had been a guest in it last night. Who was it? Why, Foster, of course—Foster with his silly laugh and amiable, mediocre eyes. Well, Foster would not be there now. No, he never would be there again.

And suddenly Fenwick started to run. He did not know why, except that, now that he had left the tarn, he was lonely. He wished that he could have stayed there all night, but because he was cold he could not, and so now he was running so that he might be at home with the lights and the familiar furniture—and all the things that he knew to reassure him.

As he ran the shale and stones scattered beneath his feet. They made a tit-tattering noise under him, and someone else seemed to be running too. He stopped, and the other runner also stopped. He breathed in the silence. He was hot now. The perspiration was trickling down his cheeks. He could feel a dribble of it down his back inside his shirt. His knees were pounding. His heart was thumping. And all around him the hills were so amazingly silent, now like india-rubber clouds that you could push in or pull out as you do those india-rubber faces, gray against the night sky of a crystal purple upon whose surface, like the twinkling eyes of boats at sea, stars were now appearing.

His knees steadied, his heart beat less fiercely, and he began to run again. Suddenly he had turned the corner and was out at the hotel. Its lamps were kindly and reassuring. He walked then quietly along the lakeside path, and had it not been for the certainty that someone was treading behind him he would have been comfortable and

at his ease. He stopped once or twice and looked back, and once he stopped and called out, "Who's there?" Only the rustling trees answered.

He had the strangest fancy, but his brain was throbbing so fiercely that he could not think, that it was the tarn that was following him, the tarn slipping, sliding along the road, being with him so that he should not be lonely. He could almost hear the tarn whisper in his ear: "We did that together, and so I do not wish you to bear all the responsibility yourself. I will stay with you, so that you are not lonely."

He climbed the road towards home, and there were the lights of his house. He heard the gate click behind him as though it were shutting him in. He went into the sitting room, lighted and ready. There were the books that Foster had admired.

The old woman who looked after him appeared.

"Will you be having some tea, sir?"

"No, thank you, Annie."

"Will the other gentleman be wanting any?"

"No; the other gentleman is away for the night."

"Then there will be only one for supper?"

"Yes, only one for supper."

He sat in the corner of the sofa and fell instantly into a deep slumber.

VI

He woke when the old woman tapped him on the shoulder and told him that supper was served. The room was dark save for the jumping light of two uncertain candles. Those two red candlesticks—how he hated them up there on the mantelpiece! He had always hated them, and now they

seemed to him to have something of the quality of Foster's voice—that thin, reedy, piping tone.

He was expecting at every moment that Foster would enter, and yet he knew that he would not. He continued to turn his head towards the door, but it was so dark there that you could not see. The whole room was dark except just there by the fireplace, where the two candlesticks went whining with their miserable twinkling plaint.

He went into the dining room and sat down to his meal. But he could not eat anything. It was odd—that place by the table where Foster's chair should be. Odd, naked, and made a man feel lonely.

He got up once from the table and went to the window, opened it and looked out. He listened for something. A trickle as of running water, a stir, through the silence, as though some deep pool were filling to the brim. A rustle in the trees, perhaps. An owl hooted. Sharply, as though someone had spoken to him unexpectedly behind his shoulder, he closed the window and looked back, peering under his dark eyebrows into the room.

Later on he went up to bed.

VII

Had he been sleeping, or had he been lying lazily as one does, half-dozing, half-luxuriously not thinking? He was wide awake now, utterly awake, and his heart was beating with apprehension. It was as though someone had called him by name. He slept always with his window a little open and the blind up. To-night the moonlight shadowed in sickly fashion the objects in his room. It was not a flood of light nor yet a sharp splash, silvering a square, a circle, throwing the rest into ebony blackness. The light was dim, a little

green, perhaps, like the shadow that comes over the hills just before dark.

He stared at the window, and it seemed to him that something moved there. Within, or rather against the green-gray light, something silver tinted glistened. Fenwick stared. It had the look, exactly, of slipping water.

Slipping water! He listened, his head up, and it seemed to him that from beyond the window he caught the stir of water, not running, but rather welling up and up, gurgling with satisfaction as it filled and filled.

He sat up higher in bed, and then saw that down the wall paper beneath the window water was undoubtedly trickling. He could see it lurch to the projecting wood of the sill, pause, and then slip, slither down the incline. The odd thing was that it fell so silently.

Beyond the window there was that odd gurgle, but in the room itself absolute silence. Whence could it come? He saw the line of silver rise and fall as the stream on the window ledge ebbed and flowed.

He must get up and close the window. He drew his legs above the sheets and blankets and looked down.

He shrieked. The floor was covered with a shining film of water. It was rising. As he looked it had covered half the short stumpy legs of the bed. It rose without a wink, a bubble, a break! Over the sill it poured now in a steady flow but soundless. Fenwick sat back in the bed, the clothes gathered to his chin, his eyes blinking, the Adam's apple throbbing like a throttle in his throat.

But he must do something, he must stop this. The water was now level with the seats of the chairs, but still was soundless. Could he but reach the door!

He put down his naked foot, then cried again. The water

was icy cold. Suddenly, leaning, staring at its dark unbroken sheen, something seemed to push him forward. He fell. His head, his face was under the icy liquid; it seemed adhesive and in the heart of its ice hot like melting wax. He struggled to his feet. The water was breast high. He screamed again and again. He could see the looking glass, the row of books, the picture of Dürer's Horse, aloof, impervious. He beat at the water, and flakes of it seemed to cling to him like scales of fish, clammy to his touch. He struggled, ploughing his way, towards the door.

The water now was at his neck. Then something had caught him by the ankle. Something held him. He struggled, crying, "Let me go! Let me go! I tell you to let me go! I hate you! I hate you! I will not come down to you! I will not——"

The water covered his mouth. He felt that someone pushed in his eyeballs with bare knuckles. A cold hand reached up and caught his naked thigh.

VIII

In the morning the little maid knocked and, receiving no answer, came in, as was her wont, with his shaving water. What she saw made her scream. She ran for the gardener.

They took the body with its staring, protruding eyes, its tongue sticking out between the clenched teeth, and laid it on the bed.

The only sign of disorder was an overturned water jug. A small pool of water stained the carpet.

It was a lovely morning. A twig of ivy idly, in the little breeze, tapped the pane.

MAJOR WILBRAHAM

I AM quite aware that in giving you this story, just as I was told it, I shall incur the charge of downright and deliberate lying.

Especially I shall be told this by anyone who knew Wilbraham personally. Wilbraham was not, of course, his real name, but I think that there are certain people who will recognize him from the description of him. I do not know that it matters very much if they do. Wilbraham himself would certainly not mind, did he know. (Does he know?) It was the thing, above all, that he wanted those last hours before he died; that I should pass on my conviction of the truth of what he told me to others. What he did not know was that I was not convinced. How could I be? But when the whole comfort of his last hours hung on the simple fact that I was, of course I pretended to the best of my poor ability. I would have done more than that to make him happy.

Most men are conscious at some time in their lives of having felt for a member of their own sex an emotion that is something more than simple companionship. It is a queer feeling quite unlike any other in life, distinctly romantic, and the more so, perhaps, for having no sex feeling in it.

Wilbraham roused just that feeling in me. I remember, with the utmost distinctness, my first meeting with him. It was just after the Boer War, and old Johnny Beaminster

gave a dinner party to some men pals of his at the Phœnix.

There were about fifteen of us, and Wilbraham was the only man present I'd never seen before. He was only a captain then, and neither so red-faced nor so stout as he afterwards became. He was pretty bulky, though, even then, and, with his sandy hair cropped close, his staring blue eyes, his toothbrush moustache, and sharp, alert movements, looked the typical traditional British officer.

There was nothing at all to distinguish him from a thousand other officers of his kind, and yet, from the moment I saw him, I had some especial and personal feeling about him. He was not in type at all the man to whom at that time I should have felt drawn, but the fact remains that I wanted to know him more than any other man in the room, and, although I only exchanged a few words with him that night, I thought of him for quite a long time afterwards.

It did not follow from this, as it ought to have done, that we became great friends. That we never were, although it was myself whom he sent for, three days before his death, to tell me his queer little story. It was then, at the very last that he confided to me that he, too, had felt something at our first meeting "different" from what one generally feels, that he had always wanted to turn our acquaintance into friendship and had been too shy. I also was shy—and so we missed one another, as I suppose, in this funny, constrained, traditional country of ours, thousands of people miss one another every day.

But although I did not see him very often and was in no way intimate with him, I kept my ears open for any account of his doings. From one point of view—the club

window outlook—he was a very usual figure, one of those stout, rubicund, jolly men, a good polo player, a good man in a house party, genial natured, and none too brilliantly brained, whom everyone liked and no one thought about. All this he was on one side of the report, but, on the other, there were certain stories that were something more than ordinary.

Wilbraham was obviously a sentimentalist and an enthusiast; there was the extraordinary case shortly after I first met him of his championship of X, a man who had been caught card-sharping and received a year's imprisonment for it. On X leaving prison Wilbraham championed and defended him, put him up for months in his rooms in Duke Street, walked as often as possible in his company down Piccadilly, and took him over to Paris. It says a great deal for Wilbraham's accepted normality and his general popularity that this championship of X did him no harm. Some men, it is true, did murmur something about "birds of a feather," and one or two kind friends warned Wilbraham in the way kind friends have, and to them he simply said:

"If a feller's a pal he's a pal."

There followed a year or two later the much more celebrated business of Lady C——. I need not go into all that now, but here again Wilbraham constituted himself her defender, although she robbed, cheated, and maligned him as she robbed, cheated, and maligned everyone who was good to her. It was quite obvious that he was not in love with her; the obviousness of it was one of the things in him that annoyed her. He simply felt, apparently, that she had been badly treated—the very last that she had been—gave her any money he had, put his rooms at the

disposal of herself and her friends, and, as I have said, championed her everywhere.

This affair did very nearly finish him socially and in his regiment. It was not so much that they minded his caring for Lady C—— (after all, any man can be fooled by any woman) but it was Lady C——'s friends who made the whole thing so impossible. Well, that affair luckily came to an end just in time. Lady C—— disappeared to Berlin and was no more seen.

There were other cases, into which I need not go, when Wilbraham was seen in strange company, always championing somebody who was not worth the championing. He had no "social tact," and for them, at any rate, no moral sense. In himself he was the ordinary normal man about town; no prude, but straight as a man can be in his debts, his love affairs, his friendships, and his sport. Then came the war. He did brilliantly at Mons, was wounded twice, went out to Gallipoli, had a touch of Palestine, and returned to France again to share in Foch's final triumph.

No man can possibly have had more of the war than he had, and it is my own belief that he had just a little too much of it.

He had been always perhaps a little "queer," as we are most of us "queer" somewhere, and the horrors of that horrible war undoubtedly affected him. Finally he lost, just a week before the Armistice, one of his best friends, Ross McLean, a loss from which he certainly never recovered.

I have now, I think, brought together all the incidents that can throw any kind of light upon the final scene.

In the middle of 1919 he retired from the army, and it was from this time to his death that I saw something of

him. He went back to his old rooms at Horton's in Duke Street, and as I was living at that time in Marlborough Chambers in Jermyn Street, we were within easy reach of one another. The early part of 1920 was a "queer time." People had become, I imagine, pretty well accustomed to realizing that those two wonderful hours of Armistice Day had not ushered in the millennium any more than those first marvellous moments of the Russian revolution produced it.

Everyone has always hoped for the millennium, but the trouble since the days of Adam and Eve has always been that people have such different ideas as to what exactly that millennium shall be. The plain facts of the matter simply were that during 1919 and 1920 the world changed from a war of nations to a war of classes, that inevitable change that history has always shown to follow on great wars.

As no one ever reads history, it was natural enough that there should be a great deal of disappointment, and a great deal of astonishment. Wilbraham, being a sentimentalist and an idealist, suffered more from this general disappointment than most people. He had had wonderful relations with the men under him throughout the war. He was never tired of recounting how marvellously they had behaved, what heroes they were, and that it was they who would pull the country together.

At the same time he had a naïve horror of Bolshevism and anything unconstitutional, and he watched the transformation of his "brave lads" into discontented and idle workmen with dismay and deep distress. He used sometimes to come round to my rooms and talk to me; he had the bewildered air of a man walking in his sleep.

During these months I came to love the man. The attraction that I had felt for him from the very first deeply underlay all my relations to him, but as I saw more of him, I found many very positive reasons for my liking. He was the simplest, bravest, purest, most loyal, and most unselfish soul alive. He seemed to me to have no faults at all, unless it were a certain softness towards the wishes of those whom he loved. He could not bear to hurt anybody, but he never hesitated if some principle in which he believed was called in question.

He was the best human being I have ever known or am ever likely to know.

Well, the crisis arrived with astonishing suddenness. About August 2d or 3d I went down to stay with some friends at the little fishing village of Rafiel in Glebeshire.

I saw him just before I left London, and he told me that he was going to stay in town for the first half of August; that he liked London in August, even though his club would be closed and Horton's delivered over to the painters.

I heard nothing about him for a fortnight, and then I received a most extraordinary letter from Box Hamilton, a fellow clubman of mine and of Wilbraham's. Had I heard, he said, that poor old Wilbraham had gone right off his "knocker"? Nobody knew exactly what had happened, but suddenly one day at lunch time Wilbraham had turned up at Grey's—the club to which our own club was a visitor during its cleaning—had harangued everyone about religion in the most extraordinary way, had burst out from there and started shouting in Piccadilly; had, after collecting a crowd, disappeared and not been seen

until the next morning, when he had been found nearly killed after a hand-to-hand fight with the market men in Covent Garden.

It may be imagined how deeeply this disturbed me, especially as I felt I was myself to blame. I had noticed that Wilbraham was ill when I had seen him in London, and I should either have persuaded him to come with me to Glebeshire or stayed with him in London. I was just about to pack up and go to town when I received a letter from a doctor in a nursing home in South Audley Street, saying that a certain Major Wilbraham was in the home, dying, and asking persistently for myself. I took a motor to Drymouth and was in London by five o'clock.

I found the South Audley Street nursing home, and was at once surrounded with the hush, the shaded rooms, the scents of medicine and flowers, and some undefinable cleanliness that belongs to those places.

I waited in a little room, the walls decorated with sporting prints, the green baize centre table laden with volumes of *Punch* and the *Tatler*. Wilbraham's doctor came in to see me, a dapper, smart little man, efficient and impersonal. He told me that Wilbraham had at most only twenty-four hours to live, that his brain was quite clear, and that he was suffering very little pain, that he had been brutally kicked in the stomach by some man in the Covent Garden crowd and had there received the internal injuries from which he was now dying.

"His brain is quite clear," the doctor said. "Let him talk. It can do him no harm. Nothing can save him. His head is full of queer fancies; he wants everyone to listen

to him. He's worrying because there's some message he wants to send—he wants to give it to you."

When I saw Wilbraham he was so little changed that I felt no shock. Indeed, the most striking change in him was the almost exultant happiness in his voice and eyes.

It is true that after talking to him a little I knew that he was dying. He had that strange peace and tranquillity of mind that one saw so often with dying men in the war.

I will try to give an exact account of Wilbraham's narrative; nothing else is of importance in this little story but that narrative. I can make no comment. I have no wish to do so. I only want to pass it on as he begged me to do.

"If you don't believe me," he said, "give other people the chance of doing so. I know that I am dying. I want as many men and women to have a chance of judging this as is humanly possible. I swear to you that I am telling the truth, and the exact truth in every detail."

I began my account by saying that I was not convinced.

How could I be convinced?

At the same time I have none of those explanations with which people are so generously forthcoming on these occasions. I can only say that I do not think Wilbraham was insane, nor drunk, nor asleep. Nor do I believe that someone played a practical joke.

Whether Wilbraham was insane between the hours when his visitor left him and his entrance into the nursing home I must leave to my readers. I myself think he was not.

After all, everything depends upon the relative importance that we place upon ambitions, possessions, emotions —ideas.

Something then suddenly became of so desperate an importance to Wilbraham that nothing else at all mattered.

He wanted everyone else to see the importance of it as he did. That is all.

It had been a hot and oppressive day; London had seemed torrid and uncomfortable. The mere fact that Oxford Street was "up" annoyed him. After a slight meal in his flat he went to the promenade concert at Queen's Hall. It was the second night of the season—Monday night —Wagner night.

He had heard no Wagner since August, 1914, and was anxious to discover the effect that hearing it again would have upon him. The effect was disappointing.

The *Meistersinger* had always been a great opera for him. The third-act music that the orchestra gave to him didn't touch him anywhere. He also discovered that six years' abstinence had not enraptured him any more deeply with the rushing fiddles in the *Tannhäuser* overture, nor with the spinning music in the *Flying Dutchman*. Then came suddenly the prelude to the third act of *Tristan*. That caught him, the peace and tranquillity that he needed lapped him round, he was fully satisfied and could have listened for another hour—a little strange, he told me, because the first half of the third act had always bored him with Tristan's eternal dying. He got up and went away, not caring to stay and listen to the efforts of an inadequate contralto to overscream the orchestra in the last agonies of *Götterdämmerung*.

He walked home down Regent Street, the quiet melancholy of the pipe music accompanying him, pleasing him, and tranquillizing him. As he reached his flat ten o'clock struck from St. James's Church. He asked the porter whether anyone had wanted him during his absence—

whether anyone was waiting for him now. (Some friend had told him that he might come up and use his spare room one night that week.) No, no one had been. There was no one there waiting.

Great was his surprise, therefore, when opening the door of his flat he found someone standing there, one hand resting on the table. His face turned towards the open door. Stronger, however, than Wilbraham's surprise was his immediate conviction that he knew his Visitor well, and this was curious, because the face was undoubtedly strange to him.

"I beg your pardon," Wilbraham said, hesitating.

"I wanted to see you," the Stranger said, smiling.

When Wilbraham was telling me this part of his story he seemed to be enveloped—"enveloped" is the word that best conveys my own experience of him—by some quite radiant happiness; he smiled at me confidentially as though he were telling me something that I had experienced with him, and that must give me the same happiness that it gave him.

"Ought I to have expected—ought I to have known?" he stammered.

"No, you couldn't have known," the Stranger answered. "You're not late. I knew when you would come."

Wilbraham told me that during these moments he was surrendering himself to an emotion of intimacy and companionship that was the most wonderful thing that he had ever known. It was that intimacy and companionship, he told me, for which all his days he had been searching. It was the one thing that life never seemed to give; even in the greatest love, the deepest friendship, there was that seed of loneliness hidden.

Now it was so wonderful that the first thing that he said was:

"And now you're going to stay, aren't you? You won't go away at once?"

"Of course I'll stay," he answered, "if you want me."

His Guest was dressed in some dark suit; there was nothing about him in any way odd or unusual. His face thin and pale. His smile kindly.

His English was without accent. His voice was soft and very melodious.

But Wilbraham could notice nothing but his eyes; they were the most beautiful, tender, gentle eyes that he had ever seen in any human being.

They sat down. Wilbraham's overwhelming fear was lest his Guest should leave him. They began to talk, and Wilbraham took it at once as accepted that his Friend knew all about him—everything.

He found himself eagerly plunging into details of scenes, episodes that he had long put behind him—put behind him for shame, perhaps, or for regret or for sorrow. He knew at once that there was nothing that he need veil nor hide—nothing. He had no sense that he must consider susceptibilities or avoid self-confession that was humiliating.

But he did find, as he talked on, a sense of shame from another side creep towards him and begin to enclose him. Shame at the smallness, meanness, emptiness of the things that he declared.

He had had always behind his mistakes and sins a sense that he was a rather unusual, interesting person; if only his friends knew everything about him they would be surprised at the remarkable man that he really was. Now

it was exactly the opposite sense that came over him. In the gold-rimmed mirror that was over his mantelpiece he saw himself diminishing, diminishing, diminishing. First himself, large, red-faced, smiling, rotund, lying back in his chair: then the face shrivelling, the limbs shortening, then the face small and peaked, the hands and legs little and mean, then the chair enormous about and around the little trembling animal cowering against the cushion.

He sprang up.

"No, no! I can't tell you any more—and you've known it all so long. I am mean, small, nothing. I have not even great ambition—nothing."

His Guest stood up and put His hand on his shoulder. They talked, standing side by side, and He said some things that belonged to Wilbraham alone, that he would not tell me.

Wilbraham asked Him why He had come—and to him.

"I will come now to a few of my friends," He said. "First one and then another. Many people have forgotten me behind my words. They have built up such a mountain over me with the doctrines they have attributed to me, the things that they say that I did. I am not really," He said laughing, His hand on Wilbraham's shoulder, "so dull and gloomy and melancholy as they have made me. I loved life; I loved men; I loved laughter and games and the open air. All things that they have forgotten. So from now I shall come back to one or two. I am lonely when they see me so solemnly."

Another thing He said: "They are making life complicated now. To lead a good life, to be happy, to manage the world, only the simplest things are needed—love, unselfishness, tolerance."

"Can I go with you and be with you always?" Wilbraham asked.

"Do you really want that?" He said.

"Yes," said Wilbraham, bowing his head.

"Then you shall come and never leave me again. In three days from now."

Then he kissed Wilbraham on the forehead and went away.

I think that Wilbraham himself became conscious as he told me this part of his story of the difference between the seen and remembered figure and the foolish, inadequate reported words. Even now, as I repeat a little of what Wilbraham said, I feel the virtue and power slipping away. But on that day when I sat beside Wilbraham's bed the conviction in his voice and eyes held me so that, although my reason kept me back, my heart told me that he had been in contact with some power that was a stronger force than anything that I myself had ever known.

But I have determined to make no personal comment on this story. I am here simply as a narrator of fact.

Wilbraham told me that after his Guest left him he sat there for some time in a dream. Then he sat up, startled as though some voice, calling, had wakened him, with an impulse that was like a fire suddenly blazing up and lighting the dark places of his brain. I imagine that all Wilbraham's impulses in the past, chivalrous, idealistic, foolish, had been of that kind—sudden, of an almost ferocious energy and determination, blind to all consequences. He must go out at once and tell everyone of what had happened to him.

I once read a story somewhere about some town that was expecting a great visitor. Everything was ready, the

banners hanging, the music prepared, the crowds waiting in the street.

A man who had once been for some years at the court of the expected visitor saw him enter the city, sombrely clad, on foot. Meanwhile, his chamberlain entered the town in full panoply with the trumpets blowing and many riders in attendance. The man who knew the real king ran to everyone telling the truth, but they laughed at him and refused to listen. And the real king departed quietly as he had come.

It was, I suppose, an influence of this kind that drove Wilbraham now.

What followed might, I think, have been to some extent averted had his appearance been different. London is a home of madmen, and casually permits any lunacy, so that public peace is not endangered. Had poor Wilbraham looked a fanatic, with pale face, long hair, ragged clothes, much would have been forgiven him, but for a staid, middle-aged gentleman, well dressed, well groomed, what could be supposed but insanity, and insanity of a very ludicrous kind?

He put on his coat and went out. From this moment his account was confused. His mind, as he spoke to me, kept returning to that Visitor. What happened after his Guest's departure was vague and uncertain to him, largely because it was unimportant. He does not know what time it was when he went out, but I gather it must have been about midnight. There were still people in Piccadilly.

Somewhere near the Berkeley Hotel he stopped a gentleman and a lady. He spoke, I am sure, so politely that the man he addressed must have supposed that he was asking for a match, or an address, or something of the kind. Wilbraham told me that very quietly he asked the gentleman

whether he might speak to him for a moment, that he had something very important to say. That he would not, as a rule, dream of interfering in any man's private affairs, but that the importance of his communication outweighed all ordinary conventions; that he expected that the gentleman had hitherto, as had been his own case, felt much doubt about religious questions, but that now all doubt was once and forever over, that——

I expect that at that fatal word "religious" the gentleman started as though he had been stung by a snake, felt that this mild-looking man was a dangerous lunatic and tried to move away. It was the lady with him, so far as I can discover, who cried out: "Oh, poor man, he's ill!" and wanted at once to do something for him.

By this time a crowd was beginning to collect, and as the crowd closed around the central figures more people gathered upon the outskirts and, peering through, wondered what had happened, whether there was an accident, whether it was a "drunk," whether there had been a quarrel, and so on.

Wilbraham, I fancy, began to address them all, telling them his great news, begging them with a desperate urgency to believe him. Some laughed, some stared in wide-eyed wonder, the crowd was increasing, and then, of course, the inevitable policeman, with his "Move on, please," appeared.

How deeply I regret that Wilbraham was not there and then arrested. He would be alive and with us now if that had been done. But the policeman hesitated, I suppose, to arrest anyone as obviously a gentleman as Wilbraham, a man, too, as he soon perceived, who was perfectly sober, even though he was not in his right mind.

Wilbraham was surprised at the policeman's interference. He said that the last thing that he wished to do was to create any disturbance, but that he could not bear to let all these people go to their beds without giving them a chance of realizing first that everything was now altered, that he had had the most wonderful news.

The crowd was dispersed, and Wilbraham found himself walking alone with the policeman beside the Green Park.

He must have been a very nice policeman, because, before Wilbraham's death, he called at the nursing home and was very anxious to know how the poor gentleman was getting on.

He allowed Wilbraham to talk to him, and then did all he could to persuade him to walk home and go to bed. He offered to get him a taxi. Wilbraham thanked him, said he would do so himself, and bade him good-night, and the policeman, seeing that Wilbraham was perfectly composed and sober, left him.

After that the narrative is more confused. Wilbraham apparently walked down Knightsbridge and arrived at last somewhere near the Albert Hall. He must have spoken to a number of different people. One man, a politician apparently, was with him for a considerable time, but only because he was so anxious to emphasize his own views about the government. Another was a journalist, who continued with him for a while because he scented a story for his newspaper. Some people may remember that there was a garbled paragraph about a "Religious Army Officer" in the *Daily Record.*

He stayed at a cabman's shelter for a time and drank a cup of coffee and told the little gathering there his news.

They took it very calmly. They had met so many queer things in their time that nothing seemed odd to them.

His account becomes clearer again when he found himself a little before dawn in the park and in the company of a woman of the town and a drunken, broken-down pugilist. I saw both these persons afterwards and had some talk with them. The pugilist had only the vaguest sense of what had happened. Wilbraham was a "proper old bird" and had given him half-a-crown to get his breakfast with. They had all slept together under a tree, and he had made some rather voluble protests because the other two would talk so continuously and prevented his sleeping. It was a warm night, and the sun had come up behind the tree "surprisin' quick."

The woman was another story. She was quiet and reserved, dressed in black with a neat little black hat with a green feather in it. She had yellow, fluffy hair, and bright, childish, blue eyes, and a simple, innocent expression. She spoke very softly and almost in a whisper. She spoke of her life quite calmly as though she had been a governesss or a waitress at a tea shop. So far as I could discover she could see nothing odd in Wilbraham, nor in anything that he had said. She was the one person in all the world who had understood him completely and found nothing out of the way in his talk. Strange when you come to think of it. The one person in the world.

She had liked him at once, she said. "I could see that he was kind," she added earnestly, as though to her that was the most important thing in all the world. No, his talk had not seemed odd to her. She had believed every word that he had said. Why not? You could not look at him and not believe what he said.

Of course, it was true. And why not? She had known lots of things funnier than that in her sordid life. What was there against it? She had always thought that there was something in what the parsons said, and now she knew it. It had been a great help to her, what the gentleman had told her. Yes, and he had gone to sleep with his head in her lap—and she had stayed awake all night thinking—and he had woken up just in time to see the sunrise. Some sunrise that was, too!

That was a curious little fact, that all three of them, even the battered pugilist, should have been so deeply struck by that sunrise. Wilbraham, on the last day of his life, when he hovered between consciousness and unconsciousness, kept recalling it as though it had been a vision.

"The sun—and the trees suddenly green and bright like glittering swords—and the sky pale like ivory. See, now the sun is rushing up, faster than ever, to take us with him—up, up, leaving the trees like green clouds beneath us—far, far beneath us——"

The woman said it was the finest sunrise she had ever seen; and, at once, when she saw it, she began to think of a policeman. He'd be moving them on, naturally, and what would he say when he found her there with a gentleman of the highest class? Say that she had been robbing him, of course. She wanted to move away, but he insisted on going with her, and they woke up the pugilist, and the three of them moved down the park.

He talked to her all the time about his plans. He was looking dishevelled now, and unshaven and dirty. She suggested that he should go back to his flat. No, he wished to waste no time. Who knew how long he had got? It might

be only a day or two. He would go to Covent Garden and talk to the men there.

She was confused as to what happened after that. When they got to the market the carts were coming in and the men were very busy.

She saw the gentleman speak to one of them very earnestly, but he was very busy and pushed him aside. He spoke to another who told him to clear out.

Then he jumped onto a box, and almost the last sight she had of him was his standing there in his soiled clothes, a streak of mud on his face, his arms outstretched and crying: "It's true! It's true—! Stop just a moment! You must hear me!"

Someone pushed him off the box. The pugilist rushed in then, cursing them and saying that the man was a gentleman and had given him half-a-crown, and then some hulking great fellow fought the pugilist and there was a regular mêlée. Wilbraham was in the middle of them, was knocked down and trampled upon. No one meant to hurt him, I think. They all seemed very sorry afterwards.

He died two days after being brought into the nursing home. He was very happy just before he died, pressed my hand, and asked me to look after the girl.

"Isn't it wonderful," were his last words to me, "that it should be true after all?"

As to Truth, who knows? Truth is a large order. This is true as far as Wilbraham goes, every word of it. Beyond that? Well, it must be jolly to be so happy as Wilbraham was.

A SILLY OLD FOOL

I

A NUMBER of years ago the canons of Polchester Cathedral were considerably the worse for wear. Four of them were lame, and hobbled up the nave on Sundays, tapping with their sticks as though "the beggars were coming to town" at last; old Canon Marsh was stone deaf, and Canon Marshall suffered from a perpetual cold, so that his sneeze and his cough were real features of Polchester life.

But the worst of them all was Canon Morphew. It was not that he had anything specific the matter with him; he simply gave the impression of infirmity. He had been a canon in Polchester forever and ever; nevertheless, he was under sixty, and his reputation for age was based very largely on his obvious failure to look after his appearance and keep himself neat and respectable. The more tender-hearted in Polchester said: "Poor old man, he has no one to look after him." The more cynical and callous said: "Bah, he's a silly old fool." That, for instance, was what Mr. Charles Beaufort said. Charles Beaufort was one of the glories of our town. His physical appearance was splendid —strong, well made, coloured just the right brown and red, dressed by a tailor in Savile Row, London, known to be a most successful speculator, and owning the handsomest house, garden, motor car, and wife in Polchester. What contrasts life presents! Canon Morphew and Charles

Beaufort! One would scarcely have supposed the same planet could have contained the two of them. Beaufort with his jolly smile, his fresh-tanned countenance, hair a little gray above the temples, his walk confident and happy, his chest superb, no sign of a stomach, and steady at the knees; and Canon Morphew, ill-shaved, his black coat shining and dusty, his nose too large, his eyes always damp as though he were about to shed tears, and a long, rambling body that seemed to be in perpetual struggle to pull itself straight.

Naturally Beaufort said he was "a silly old fool." He said it in a kindly friendly fashion, as one might speak of a pathetic monkey behind the bars at the zoo, or an old mongrel chased down the street with a can tied onto its tail. Beaufort, in fact, was a kindly man. Why should he be otherwise, when he was so completely satisfied with himself and all that was his? "It's a good world," he would say, stretching out his limbs luxuriously. "A damned good world." He had rather a contempt in general for the clergy. What he liked was "a man of the world." Now, no one could say that clergy as a whole were "men of the world." Only once had Polchester possessed as Canon a man of the world, and that, of course, was Canon Berrison of glorious memory who defeated Archdeacon Manning on that famous battlefield where . . . but that is another story, and belongs to the early 'nineties.

Beaufort always thought it a humorous thing that his lot should have been cast in a cathedral town, but that was, of course, because he had derived most of his splendour and affluence from the clay works near Rafiel, and if you had to spend your days in Glebeshire you might as well spend them in Polchester. He ran up to town fre-

quently, and he would make them roar with laughter at the club as he described the canons: Canon Marsh and his deafness, Canon Marshall and his cold, Canon Woods and his asthma, and so on. His best character sketch, however, was undoubtedly Canon Morphew. "You should see the old fool," he would cry, scarcely able to speak for his merriment, "his legs one way, his arms another, trying to blow his nose and blowing his left ear instead. Of all the silly old fools . . . !"

It was not altogether true that Canon Morphew had no one to look after him; he had his housekeeper, Mrs. Bartholomew. I don't know that Mrs. Bartholomew was much of a hand at looking after people, a grizzly, dirty, horn-fisted old woman of nearly seventy; a severe Methodist with very limited ideas of cleanliness and order. She had been in Canon Morphew's service for twenty years, or, rather, as the wits in Polchester used to say, he had been in hers. That was the reason, perhaps, Canon Morphew never invited people to his house. Mrs. Marsh had once been to tea with him, and she said that the way that Bartholomew (she was always known as Bartholomew *tout court*) spoke to him was terrible to hear. Mrs. Marsh was quite frightened and was very sorry for the poor man —however, with a "silly old fool" like that, what could you expect?

One morning, at breakfast, just before leaving for his office in the Cury (the smartest office in Polchester), Beaufort told his wife that he had seen the old man the evening before, toiling up the High Street, on his way home, in a gale of wind and rain. "You never saw such a sight, my dear. Struggling with his umbrella and then it blew inside out. You should have seen him stop and look

at it, and then shake his fist at it. I don't mind betting he hasn't got the money to buy a new one."

Now Mrs. Charles Beaufort was a tender-hearted woman—that is, so long as her tender heart didn't lead her into any very difficult and awkward places. She was sentimental, and her eyes would fill with tears when a band played or when she read in the paper about a man ill-treating a dog, or when she heard that a friend was going to be married. She was a large, handsome woman with an iron bosom and gay bright clothes and a happy manner. "I do like Mamie Beaufort," many people said; "she's always happy."

She was happy indeed, but then she also found it difficult to realize very actively the situation of anyone not Mrs. Beaufort. She had a perfect digestion, plenty of money, no children, and a Pekingese. She also collected old china.

She was, however, really distressed by her husband's description of poor Canon Morphew. She thought about it several times that morning, and in the afternoon she did an amazing thing; she went to see him. She could not think afterwards why she did it. As she said to one of her friends next day, "My dear, you may laugh at me as much as you like. It was just one of my impulses. Sometimes when I'm moved there's no knowing what I'll do. I'm like that. Charles has said to me over and over again, 'Mamie, I believe you'd collect all the lame dogs and help them over all the stiles in Europe if you could.' One can't help one's nature, I suppose. But really I'm afraid sometimes where it will lead me."

It led her on this occasion to Canon Morphew's house, and the moment she was inside she wished she was outside again. She did not know what she proposed to do. She

could not offer to buy him a new umbrella; besides, umbrellas were expensive. She thought at first she would ask him to come and see her, but then when she saw him standing, trembling, in front of her, "she thought she really couldn't." And the house! He lived in one of those old houses at the back of the Close, those old houses all piled together like a maniac's dream, crooked and tumbling and shabby, but so picturesque from the river walk far beneath them that they are always pointed out to our visitors as "the really old part of the town." Mrs. Beaufort seemed to fall at once into a medley of dirty books and tattered papers. She was shown by the frowning Bartholomew into the study, a little room on the ground floor with grimy windows looking out onto the wall of the next house. Here she stood nervously, like Venus rising out of a sea of newspaper. Old bookcases ran up to the ceiling, and on their shelves were piled the dustiest, most ancient books—books without covers, huge tomes in faded calf, soiled and battered remnants of ancient libraries. The newspapers, tied up in great bundles with dirty pieces of string, stood piled up upon the floor, and in the middle of them floated an ancient bureau, its little drawers choked to suffocation with bundles of papers. Dust filled the air so that Mrs. Beaufort coughed and coughed again. Really! What was she about? She determined to retire as soon as possible.

It was, however, worse when the Canon stood in front of her. He was plainly so terrified by her visit that it was an agony to look at him. He stared at her, moving restlessly on his legs, gazing at her with his mouth open, speechless. She said what she could—she thought that she would call. She had only a moment, but she wondered whether he knew about the bazaar they were to have in August for the

Sailors' Orphanage? His face fell. A look of real disappointment hovered about his mouth. She saw that he had supposed she had come for himself, and himself alone; at that she was touched, really touched, so that she forgot the dust and the books and the newspapers and became for at least five minutes the kind, generous-hearted woman that she might really have been had she not married Charles Beaufort.

She assured him that she had not really come for the subscription; she had come also for himself. She felt that it was really a shame that they should be in the same town all those years and not know one another. She had met the other canons at the Dean's, the Archdeacon's, and all the other places, but she had never seen him at any tea party. He was a great student, she supposed. She looked round at the books. What a lot he must have read and—and—— She paused. What could she say next?

Shyly, with terrible enbarrassment, he begged her to come upstairs. He had not intended his housekeeper to show her into this untidy room. He was afraid that the dust—desperately he bolted out of the room and led the way of the crooked stairs. In the sitting room things were better. This really might have been a pretty room had there been someone to look after it properly, with its bow window hanging out over the river and its broad fireplace and good square shape. But, of course, it was in a terrible mess. Two pictures, old prints of Polchester, hung crookedly on the walls, there were some old, rather handsome chairs, and a desk with a glass bookcase on top of it.

Mrs. Beaufort sat on one of the chairs and Canon Morphew on another. He begged her to excuse him; he had been taken by surprise; there should be some tea in a moment

. . . that, however, she prevented. No, please—no tea for her on any account. She must positively go in a moment. She had promised Mrs. Dean—just five minutes to admire his charming view. The owner of the view was engaged in the desperate business of trying to make himself decent for his visitor without her noticing what he was about, making a furtive dash at a mysterious spot here and a blind snatch at a piece of cotton there, and a hurried rub of the knees or the waistcoat. Between these raids at his person he gazed at her open-mouthed and tried to think of something to say. She had never in all her experience found conversation so difficult; she struggled and struggled like a person who finds himself at the very edge of a precipice and catches onto any piece of earth that will save him.

Then she thought of Mrs. Mander. She thought of Mrs. Mander because she was in Mrs. Beaufort's view just as incongruous a figure as Canon Morphew.

"You know Mrs. Mander, don't you, Canon Morphew?" she asked.

"Oh—ah—yes—quite so," he gasped.

Mrs. Mander was one of our Polchester widows, a woman of about fifty, shy, awkward, and unhappy, longing to be married again, but, being plain and unattractive, with very little means, she lingered on in her widow's weeds. She was "not quite a lady," and Mrs. Beaufort, when she met her, patronized her with an amiable vigour that left the poor woman pale and trembling. Mrs. Beaufort, having mentioned her, was bound to continue, so on she went quite recklessly and simply to fill up the horrible gap.

"I do like her," said Mrs. Beaufort. "I think you'd like her, Canon Morphew, if you knew her."

"Perhaps—perhaps," said the Canon.

"She likes you very much. Only the other day she was saying how clever she thought you were. I assure you she did. She's more intelligent than she seems. I think she appreciates you more than you know. But she's shy. We women—you know what we are!"

The Canon didn't know what they were at all, but he said, "Ah—yes."

"You should go out a little more," said Mrs. Beaufort rising. "I'll ask you and Mrs. Mander to meet. You'll come if I invite you, won't you?"

"Ah—yes," said the Canon.

Then with many friendly smiles Mrs. Beaufort departed, shaking very literally the dust off her pretty and expensive shoes.

"Mind you come and see me, Canon," she gaily insisted, wagging her little finger at him.

On the way home she considered:

"Now whatever did I tell that lie for? Mrs. Mander has never mentioned him, poor soul." Then at the thought of those two curiosities together she gave one of her little tinkling laughs, "like a silver bell," an admirer had once said. So, well satisfied, she went in to her tea.

II

Canon Morphew was left in a bewildered state; for the rest of that day he was unequal to his work and would break off continually from his investigations into the real meaning of the second chapter of the Revelation of St. John the Divine to consider Mrs. Beaufort's brilliant figure, her gleaming dress, her silver laugh, and the soft warm pressure of her hand. But why, why, why had she

come to see him? She, leader of fashion and society as she was, was not the kind of woman to pay unnecessary visits to shabby old men—for that he was a shabby old man the Canon had no doubt at all. All the evening he considered this matter, and then, just as he took off his brown woollen dressing gown and was prepared to climb into bed, it struck him. Of course, she had come as an emissary from Mrs. Mander.

As that wonderful thought truly presented itself to him he blushed all over his body. He lay on his back looking up at his spider-webbed ceiling and indulging in the happiest dreams he had ever allowed himself. All his life he had had a tendency in this dangerous direction of dreaming, and all his life he had checked himself. Very early in his career he had decided that he was a plain, ugly fellow, and that no woman would ever look at him; he had been always shy and bashful, but the thought of his ugliness was a real agony to him. Very wrong in a servant of Christ to think of his body, but what he would have given for his nose to be a little smaller, his eyes a little brighter, his ears a little less red, or to have in any degree at all that capacity for making one's self smart and handsome that some young fellows so casually possessed. And he liked women! He had always hoped in those early days that he would soon be married. It seemed possible then. He was a clever fellow, gained a scholarship at Emmanuel, Cambridge, won a double first, and then joined Bishop Walters at Polchester. His future seemed as though it might be a brilliant one; he had an especial talent for Greek texts and a very fair dialectical ability. Bishop Walters considered him one of his most promising men. And then it all faded away. How it faded no one exactly

knew, but fade it did. Women laughed at him, or he fancied that they laughed. He aged very quickly, bending over crabbed texts and tearing the heart out of musty old folios. Then conversation never came easily to him. He was always a little deaf, and if several people were talking at once he found it difficult to catch the right threads. Above all there was his natural diffidence, his real deep modesty, his sense of his uncouth ugliness, his true belief that everyone he met was better and wiser and more attractive than he. Also he was poor, having no private means. Nevertheless, for many years he thought and thought about marriage, considering how delightful it would be to have children, and how he would teach his boy Latin and Greek and see him swim in the Pol.

Well, the day never came. Bartholomew came instead, and after Bartholomew's arrival he put his dreams into a deep hole in the garden of his mind, covered them up, and stamped them down and refused to look at them again.

Nevertheless, in two short sentences Mrs. Beaufort had managed to scatter the soil, dig up the dreams, and present them to their owner as fresh as when they were buried. He struggled, he fought, he said that his time was past for such things—all of no avail. He was caught, he was caught! Mrs. Beaufort had indeed mentioned the one woman above all others likely to seize the Canon's imagination. Mrs. Mander was quiet, orderly, decent, of a good age, without pretensions, kindly, he was sure. He had always liked to look at her in the cathedral, sitting so quiet there, saying her prayers as though she meant them and listening to the sermon with real attention. Oh, she was a religious woman, there was no doubt!—a true religious woman. He had never spoken to her, but he had fancied

that on the Sundays when his sermon came round she had been especially attentive, and he had thought of her afterwards and wondered whether she had noticed this or that point that he had made. And then Mrs. Beaufort had said that she admired him. Mrs. Beaufort would not be likely to lie about it. Why should she? Oh, no! There was something in it, there was indeed. And then he was not so old, only fifty-nine. He must brush himself up a bit, shave more carefully, have his hair cut more frequently. He would order a new suit and buy some new boots.

He began at once to clear the study a little, to put away some of the newspapers and arrange the books. Bartholomew, her suspicions already roused by the eccentricity of Mrs. Beaufort's visit, watched his effort with a dark malignity.

The very next morning he met Mrs. Mander. He met her in the High Street. When he saw her he felt as though he had been talking to her for weeks, so much had he been thinking of her during the last two days. He stopped and smiled, and she stopped too, looking at him with that shy timidity so attractive in her.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I—I—Mrs. Mander, I think."

"Yes," she said.

"You'll think it very strange," he continued, "very odd —but—ah—you're walking this way?"

She said, "Yes," and they walked up the steep High Street together.

He was inspired. He had suddenly lost his shyness and hesitation. "I've seen you so often in cathedral, Mrs. Mander," he said. "You're a very regular attendant. Ours is a wonderful cathedral, is it not?"

Oh, it was a *wonderful* cathedral, she agreed. She couldn't tell him how wonderful she thought it, and how much it had done for her. She didn't think she could have *pulled through* had it not been for the cathedral. It had been such a friend to her. Oh, *such* a friend!

Quite so. He nodded his head. He understood it exactly. He felt that himself. Sometimes one was—well—a little lonely, perhaps, and—and—well, there was the cathedral.

She agreed. It was just that. One *was* lonely sometimes, and what a relief to have that cathedral to go to!

They had reached the entrance to the Close. It was a wonderful summer morning, and the green grass flared in the sun. *Such* a day, wasn't it? Yes, real summer at last! Quite hot — delightful — good-morning — good-morning. And so they went their several ways.

III

To Canon Morphew that night the world was a changed place. You may say that it is not likely that an old gentleman of nearly sixty would be so romantic as to allow one conversation with an elderly widow to alter his views of the world, but I say to that that one is never too old to snatch at a chance and never too hopeless to believe in a sudden gift from heaven. The Canon had indulged in dreams all his life, but of course, he had divulged them to nobody.

He lay awake that night and thought of Mrs. Mander. The more he thought of her the more he liked her, and the more he thought her the proper wife for himself. He got up suddenly out of bed, lighted a candle, and looked at himself in the looking glass. As he stood there in his nightshirt, the breezes flowing about his bare legs, he really

thought that he was not so bad. He had an interesting face, arresting. When he brushed his thin gray hair back from his forehead he was greatly improved. Of course, his nose *was* large, but it looked much larger when he hadn't shaved, and he determined now to shave with the most scrupulous care.

He wasn't really *so* old. What was fifty-nine in these days? He had been worrying too long over old books in dusty corners. He must take exercise, go for walks, and even perhaps play golf. It looked an easy game. It was called "an old man's pastime." He returned to bed not so ill-satisfied with himself. She had said "Yes!" and "No!" so modestly, just looking up at him and then dropping her eyes again. Oh, he could love her very dearly! He had wanted someone to love for so long, and he was the sort of man who knew how to love were he only given a chance. He had very happy dreams that night.

Next morning he was quite severe with Bartholomew. He told her that he wanted the rooms dusted. Dust the rooms! And who was to dust the rooms? There was the woman who came very day—he supposed that she came in to do work of some kind or another. How did she earn her money? Bartholomew stared at him with an astonished anger. What had happened to the old fool? Here had she been all these years working him into a proper condition of apathy and submission, and here he was suddenly showing signs of life and energy. This would never do!

"Of course, sir," she said, standing over him, arms akimbo, "if you're not satisfied, I must go. I won't say that I 'aven't worked for you 'ard all these years—it wouldn't be fair to meself not to say that—worked my fingers to the bone, some might say I 'ad, and never a word

of thanks 'ave I 'ad for it—but there, them as expects gratitude in this world will be disappointed and they may as well make up their minds to it."

"Nonsense, woman," he interrupted her. "I only want the rooms dusted. It ought to have been done long ago."

Woman, indeed! She would never forgive the old fool so long as she lived. Woman, indeed! He should pay for that word. She went away intent upon revenge.

It happened that after this he met Mrs. Mander nearly every day; quite by chance too. He wondered that it had not happened long ago. They always had now a little walk. She did not say very much: a silent woman, silent through modesty, he supposed; but he found himself talking to her with a wonderful readiness and spontaneity. The following Sunday saw the beginning of his sermon month. He prepared that sermon as he had never prepared a sermon before. He wrote every line of it with his eyes upon Mrs. Mander. The subject was Brotherly Love, and he felt that it was really the most daring thing that he had ever done in his life. He pointed out, in the course of it, that we must never be unprepared to meet affection in most unexpected places, and that when we did meet it, we should respond to it and see that we did not treat it harshly. There never could be too much love in the world, and it would be a serious matter for us if we rejected it when it came our way. He would have liked to speak to her after the service, but he had no opportunity. He did meet Mrs. Dean in the cloisters, and he was surprised at his volubility and easy manner. Mrs. Dean, though small in stature, had a terrifying manner, and he had been always paralyzed in her presence. To-day he was so gay and bright that she said to the Dean at luncheon that she was afraid that Canon

Morphew was really beginning to break up. Couldn't the bishop find him a living in the country? He was becoming so strange in his manner that really she was afraid that one day soon there'd be a scandal.

Now the question was, What was the next step to be taken? The matter must not be too long left unsettled, or Mrs. Mander might be snatched up by someone else. That was now the Canon's nightmare. He regarded everyone over forty with the eye of incipient jealousy. No one was too old or too ugly to escape his suspicions. He saw Mrs. Mander in the High Street talking to Canon Smart, and although Canon Smart was married, yet you never could tell. But especially was there one figure who roused the Canon's apprehensions; this was the figure of Mr. Prout, the master of the Choir School. Mr. Prout was about fifty years of age and a bachelor; he lived with his sister. He was a fat, pale-faced man with round legs and arms and a little waxed moustache. Not an attractive man, surely! He had a high treble voice like a girl's and a silly little laugh. Nevertheless, his strength was that he was immensely musical. He could play the piano like Paderewski, the fiddle like Kubelik, and the organ like the man (or was it woman?) in Sir Arthur Sullivan's famous song. Mrs. Mander liked music and had told the Canon that she sometimes stepped into the cathedral and sat at the back of the nave "just to hear the organ practising." The Canon trembled when he thought of this lure offered by Mr. Prout. He would have learned some musical instrument himself had there been time or any sign of musical ability. Alas, there was neither of these things. He could not tell one tune from another.

It was obvious then that he must move quickly. The

Horticultural Show presented itself suddenly as an unrivalled opportunity.

IV

The Horticultural Show is, or, rather, was, in our town the great event of the summer. The finest Horticultural Show in Glebeshire, and we were rightly proud of it. Granted the weather was fine, nothing could be more delightful. We called our band the Blue Hungarian Band, we put on our most beautiful clothes, and we had a dance in the evening. Canon Morphew had never been to a Horticultural Show in his life; he had the vaguest ideas as to what a Horticultural Show might be. Nevertheless, he knew that it was a gay affair in which gentlemen walked with ladies up and down, gave them tea, and paid them compliments. Why should not he go as well as another, and why should not Mrs. Mander go with him? Did she really consent to come, he would regard it almost as an acceptance of him. He trembled when he thought of the adventure. There were so many foolish things that he might do, he would be frightened and awkward and out of place.

But if she were there to smile at him and encourage him he need not fear. He felt that then he would be as brave as any lion.

He ordered his new clothes, had his hair cut at Hill's, and wrote Mrs. Mander this letter:

DEAR MRS. MANDER:

I see that next Tuesday week is to be our Horticultural Show. I wonder whether you would think it very impertinent of me were I to suggest that you should allow me to take you to that gay event? It would give me so much

pleasure if we might go together. I believe the roses are really wonderful, worth anyone's attention. Pray do me the honour of being my companion. I would call for you about four o'clock on that afternoon.

Yours very sincerely,
WILLIAM MORPHEW.

With what agony he waited for her reply! He did not sleep that night at all, and as soon as he heard the click of the letters in the letter box next morning he ran (yes, positively ran) downstairs. Bartholomew had the letters in her hand, and she gazed at his dressing gown and bare legs in amazement. He snatched the letters from her. Yes, there was one in a pink envelope with a little purple monogram in the corner. He tore it open. He read:

DEAR CANON MORPHEW:

How very good of you! Indeed I shall be delighted to come. Yes, I'm told the roses are beautiful. What weather we're having! I shall expect you then about four o'clock on Tuesday week.

Yours very sincerely,
KATHERINE MANDER.

The world turned round with him as he read that letter. He could have embraced Bartholomew as she stood grimly watching. He went upstairs, fell on his knees, and offered up a long prayer of thanksgiving. Surely she would not have accepted had she not cared for him. This could mean only one thing. Oh, but he would be good to her! He would show her that a man of fifty-nine was as good as any youngster, as good and better. He sang that morning as he worked, sang in a strange, broken, hideous voice; Bartholomew, in the darkness of her kitchen, heard and trembled. Either he was going mad or some woman had

got hold of him. But what woman would ever bother about an old fool like that?

Meanwhile the Canon *was* changing—quite a number of people noticed it. His new clothes arrived and fitted very well; he had now a Dantesque appearance with his pointed chin and his sad eyes. He often stopped to speak to people in the High Street, and indeed was noticed to linger about —a thing that he had never been known to do before.

He met Mrs. Beaufort one day, and she was quite startled by the change in him. How she made her husband laugh that night! "I believe he's in love—queer old creature," she said. "He smiles now in the most ferocious way, and looks so gay as to be almost indecent for a canon." Then one day he had quite a walk with Mrs. Mander. He met her on the path under the cathedral, above the orchards and the river, one of the prettiest walks in Polchester. She was coming along very demurely, carrying a little parcel. She smiled when she saw him and then dropped her eyes to the ground. How modest and good she looked in her black dress, and quite young he thought! She didn't say anything very much—she was always a very silent woman—but she agreed with everything he said. He felt that he was on the very top of the mountain of Romance that morning; the sun was shining, the green of the orchards was like a soft cloud beneath the gray cathedral walk, the birds were singing, and a barge, red and yellow, was slowly sliding down the river. A lovely day! He carried her parcel; then he began for the first time since his acquaintance with her to talk about himself, his early life, his hopes and ambitions, how even he had a burning desire to finish his work on the Revelation of St. John, a book he had been preparing now for a great many

years. But he was lonely; he would confess to Mrs. Mander that sometimes he was terribly lonely. "Marriage is a very happy state, Mrs. Mander," he said, his heart beating wildly at his boldness, "or it should be when man and wife are truly suited to one another." Mrs. Mander agreed with him, but then as she agreed with everything that he said he couldn't be sure that she meant anything very much. Her silences were very baffling. He had heard someone say on an earlier occasion that "she was the last word in stupidity." But he didn't think her stupid. He hated bold, daring women who thrust themselves forward on every possible opportunity. After his daring allusion to marriage he was suddenly very shy. What must she think of him? He snatched a glance at her. Impossible to tell what she was thinking. Her eyes were veiled. Their ways parted. She stopped to shake his hand; hers lay for a moment in his; it was so soft and warm that he trembled all over.

"I'm looking forward to Tuesday," he said.

"Oh, yes," she said.

"I do hope it will be fine," he said.

"Oh, so do I!" she answered.

He went home in a desperate state of love. The whole of his romantic, sensitive, lonely soul was staked now upon this venture. He found that he could not say his prayers, he could not think about God very much, but he believed that God would understand, and, in spite of himself, he made bargains with God, promising every sort of self-sacrifice and humiliation if God would give him Mrs. Mander.

He had now very little doubt about the success of his appeal. Had not Mrs. Beaufort said at the very beginning that Mrs. Mander cared for him? And how could he doubt the embarrassment and sweet confusion? He could not

expect from her the romantic impetuosity and emotion of a young woman. They were both too old for that kind of thing. He did not expect very much from her of any kind, but the thought of having now someone for whom he might care, someone to whom he might give things, someone for whom he might work and for whom he might die, if need be, that surrounded him now day and night with a soft happy glow, a sense of riotous youth and independence and the beginning of life, gloriously, all over again.

The only serious trouble was Mr. Prout. Mr. Prout was always turning up. He seemed now, to the Canon, to be everywhere, with his ugly moustache and "his flabby cheeks." That laugh of his, so effeminate and shrill, could be heard a mile away. He seemed to laugh at everything and everybody. Then, on the very morning before the show, the Canon met Mr. Prout and Mrs. Mander together in Dunkins' bookshop. He came in to buy a copy of *The Church Times*, and there were the two of them standing by the counter, talking and laughing together. Yes—laughing! The Canon realized with a horrible pang that he had never seen Mrs. Mander laugh before—smile, yes, and often—but this was a jolly, happy laugh as though she were immensely enjoying herself. He stood there, his clerical bosom a very un-Christian field for jealousy, loneliness, anger, and indignation. Indignation! Why? He had no right. Mrs. Mander was not his property. Why should she not laugh? He was bitterly ashamed of himself as he hurried home, but he caught perhaps at the moment a glimpse of the peril in which he was placing himself. He saw that he had, during this last fortnight, trusted his all to one issue. If that issue failed . . . he could not say, he dared not think, he *would* not think.

Next day was flamboyant with a blaze of sun. Of all the horticultural shows this promised to be the finest—the sky was a sheet of burning blue; warm mists hovered over the river, and the heat could in the early morning be felt pushing its way up through the shadows of hedge and road.

Bartholomew had by now arrived at a rather true summary of the situation. Only the contemplation of matrimony could have wrought this change in her master, and matrimony meant, she knew well, her own exit. She was a mean old woman, with no thought in the world but the increasing of her little hoard of savings. She had no love for anyone or anything; she enjoyed bullying the Canon; she liked to see him tremble before one of her tempers—now it seemed that there was a danger of his escaping her. . . . Well, if he did *not* escape she would let him know it.

At a quarter to four the Canon set out for Mrs. Mander's house. He felt a strange uneasy foreboding. He had none of the earlier confidence with which he had met her a week ago. That man Prout! He was responsible for this self-distrust. The Canon wore his new clothes and his new boots, but nevertheless that last look at the glass had not been altogether reassuring. His nose, how large it was; his eyes how ugly; his mouth how unattractive! Supposing Mrs. Beaufort had been wrong in her suggestion about Mrs. Mander; supposing—— No, he would not. Angrily he turned away to face the world. This thing could only be carried off with bravery and pluck. He had been a poor-spirited creature all his life. Let him be a man now. He cast one last look around his dirty untidy house before he went off. If it should really be true that soon he would have someone there with him, someone with taste and

pretty ways, someone to fling out the dirt and ugliness and to replace them with cleanliness and beauty? He did then send one urgent prayer to God that He would not now desert him. He had never in all his life asked for anything before; one request in a lifetime was surely not too much. Bartholomew watched him with black looks from her kitchen window.

"Silly old fool," she said, cursing him.

He found Mrs. Mander in a beautiful costume of black and white. It seemed to him a wonderful omen that she should have discarded her black to-day. His heart beat high. He paid her one of his elaborate, stumbling compliments. She thanked him, with her charming modesty, and they started off. The Horticultural Show was in Painster Piece, two large fields on the hill above the cathedral. To reach it was a real climb, up the High Street and then turning aside from The Rose up Orange Street, and so to the heights of St. Borowyn and the fields beyond. Here was a fine view, the town lying gray and red-brown in the sunlight like an amber setting to the old pearl gray of the cathedral, and below the Pol winding its ways into the woods and meadows bounded by the hills that guarded the sea. Slowly, as they climbed, happiness stole into the heart of the Canon. He spoke very little, being fully occupied with the labour of the walk, but all kinds of old half-remembered instincts crept back into his heart as he felt the presence of his companion. It seemed to him that he was already married, that very little more would be needed to jerk the all-important words from his lips. They came to the little wooden stile just beyond the Precincts before they plunged into the wooded path that led to Orange Street. Here they paused for a moment; he

mopped his brow. "Lovely weather," he gasped. "Lovely," she repeated, smiling timidly at him.

He might, on a sudden impulse, have proposed to her there. How altered both their lives had he done so! She might not have accepted him, but of that we cannot be certain. Assuredly in his new suit, brushed and smartened as he was, he looked no undistinguished figure. She had long been lonely, and he was a very wise and learned man—kindly too; no one could be with him even five minutes without seeing the goodness of his heart. But he was out of breath and hot, and she stood there saying nothing; the golden moment passed. . . . They went on up the hill.

Now, however, he felt sure of his success. There had been something in her silence most truly eloquent; he felt that the air around them throbbed with meaning. So young did he feel, so hopeful, with this brave assurance that there seemed no danger in waiting a little. They reached the top of Orange Street beside the Grammar School, then turned up the narrow little lane with the high hedges, Glebeshire fashion, hanging thick above their heads. Perhaps then she wished for him to speak, wondered why he did not, and was half prompted to say something herself that would lead him on. However, she did not, and again the golden moment passed. They crossed out of the lane into the burning sunlight by the field. Here at the gate was a tent flaunting a flag, and in front of the tent a turnstile. The strains of the Blue Hungarian Band could be heard on the air. The Canon was about to press into the crowd and purchase two tickets when he saw—he saw—Mr. Prout.

At the sight of that stout body and that perky straw

hat a horrible sickness struck his stomach; the field, the blue sky, the tent, the crowd seemed to turn and dance dizzily in midair, his knees quivered, and a desperate cry rose from his very soul. "O God! Keep that man away! Turn his eyes from us! Help us to escape him!"

But they were not to escape. Mrs. Mander said: "Why, there's Mr. Prout!" A moment later the hated figure was bending in front of them, the shrill piping voice was saying:

"Why, Mrs. Mander, what a fortunate meeting! Afternoon, Canon! You don't often attend these affairs, surely!"

Mrs. Mander said: "Fancy seeing you, Mr. Prout."

Mr. Prout said: "What luck for me! I'm alone. I'll attach myself to your party, if you have no objection."

The supreme moment of the Canon's life had arrived, and he knew it. Many men would have known how to beat off the attack. Many men, but not the Canon. He paid now for all these years in which he had lived apart from the world—he paid, most bitterly he paid. No words would come to him; he could only stare at that hated face, at that loathsome moustache, at the ridiculous flannels and bright purple tie, and those fat pale cheeks. He saw his judgment descending upon him. A moment more and it would be too late. He made a frantic effort. No words came. . . . They all passed through the stile together.

V

As they mingled with the gay, fashionable crowd he felt himself most ludicrously out of place. He fancied that people were looking at him, laughing at him for being there, above all wondering that he should attach himself

to such a man as Prout. And Prout kept up a stream of chatter. He never ceased. He talked about the silliest things in the silliest way; he made the most terrible jokes. Soon he began to have a kind of secret code with Mrs. Mander. He whispered to her, and she giggled. Still the Canon could think of nothing to say. He knew that the day was even now not lost could he but think of something witty or amusing. But all he could think of was to say to Prout: "Go away! Go away! We don't want you! We are much happier without you! Go away!"

But was Mrs. Mander much happier without him? The Canon had a horrible suspicion that she was enjoying herself more than she had done when they were walking up the lane. She was laughing a great deal and growing more and more confidential. . . .

Soon they were pushing on ahead, and the Canon was being left behind. He tried to keep up; he thought of a sentence that began, "The truth is, Prout . . ." but no words would come. They were involved in a riot of silk and laces, and scent and roses. They were very near the Blue Hungarian Band; the noise was deafening. Mrs. Mander leaned back over her shoulder and seemed to say something. A moment later and she and her musical cavalier had vanished.

The Canon was left standing there, jolted, pushed, around him a jesting crowd who treated him with utter contempt, a crowd of strangers and even enemies. Men were laughing, women were laughing. The band played on with a strident scream, the big drum banged monotonously, the sun poured down out of a blazing sky. He could see no one whom he knew; he would not have recognized anyone had he seen. His eyes were dim, his knees shaking

so that he could scarcely stand, his tongue dry in his mouth. The colours seemed to grow brighter and brighter, the noise more and more strident.

What had she said? He did not know, but she ought not to have left him like that—no, she ought not. It wasn't kind. This was hell. He realized now what hell was. His new clothes were covered with dust. Someone jolted him in the side, some others pushed against him and nearly knocked him over. Oh, she hadn't been kind, she hadn't been kind. . . .

Like a blind man, with despair and a strange terror in his heart, he crept out of the tumultuous field into the quiet of the little dark lane.

VI

Two days later he heard someone in the cloisters say to Canon Smart: "Have you heard? Prout's engaged to Mrs. Mander. Whatever she could see . . ."

He was not surprised—quite what he had expected. He had known when she had left him like that that he had been building his castle on illusion. But why had Mrs. Beaufort said what she did? That had not been kind of her, not at all kind. Perhaps she had been joking.

He was like a wounded man. He felt ill somewhere inside, somewhere near the heart. He did not sleep at all. He never left his house except to go to the cathedral.

Everything in the house now failed him. How dirty it was, how horrible! But he did not care. He let Bartholomew do what she would. He looked at his notes on St. John. How silly! Who wanted to read notes on St. John? He opened his favourite edition of George Herbert, with the Izaak Walton life at the end of it. But his eyes fell on

the passage about his good marriage, how that they were "indeed so happy that there was never any opposition betwixt them, unless it were a contest which should most incline to a compliance with the other's desires."

He could not read on; he closed the book forever. Worst of all, it seemed to him that his trust in God was gone. He had asked for one thing, only one, and it had been refused him. God, perhaps, knew best. He did not care very much.

He went to bed, and a week later he died. As soon as she was sure that the breath had left his body, Bartholomew hunted the house up and down. All that she found, however, was six and eightpence halfpenny.

Next morning Mr. Prout said to his fiancée:

"Old Morphew's kicked the bucket."

"Poor old man," said Mrs. Mander, with a little sigh.

Beaufort saw the news at breakfast.

"Old Morphew's dead," he said.

"Poor old thing," said Mrs. Beaufort. "High time. I wonder what he died of."

THE ENEMY

AT A quarter past eight in the morning, every working day of the year, summer and winter, little Jack Harding left his little house in Ealing for the Charing Cross Road, where he had a little bookshop. A month every year he took a holiday, but even during that month he might be said to go through the same procedure, because, wherever he might be, he woke up at half-past seven and, lying on his back in bed, went through all the stages of dressing, having breakfast, hurrying to the station, changing at Hammersmith, getting out at Leicester Square, walking up to the little shop, scolding the boy with adenoids, opening his correspondence, and entering happily on the business of the day. It was luxurious indeed to lie on one's back and take this journey, hearing the waves murmur outside one's window, or seeing the clouds pass in lazy procession, or hearing the separator hard at work in some distant part of the farmhouse. He enjoyed his holiday, of course, but he enjoyed still more getting back to work again. He loved his shop, although it made him the barest living in these difficult post-war days, and he could not be said to care very generally for books for their own sake. He was a little man, stout and round like a rolling pin, with very small feet and hands, of which he was immensely proud. He was cheery and optimistic by temperament, loved to hear the sound of his own voice, and, although he

was forty-five, was still unmarried. He enjoyed the society of ladies, but liked them in general rather than in particular. An old woman looked after him and his little house, cheated him and robbed him, scolded him and abused him, except when he was ill, when she adored him and took an enormous amount of trouble to make him comfortable. He had only one enemy in the world.

Now the point about this enemy was that he had seldom spoken to him. Some years ago, when he had first come to live in Ealing, he had noticed on his regular morning journey a large, heavy, red-faced man, who lived apparently in his own street, always plunged out of his door at precisely the moment when he, Harding, passed it, and so plunged apparently in order to have a bright morning conversation. In fact, it very soon became Harding's conviction that the large, heavy gentleman waited behind the dining-room curtain until he saw him approach and then made his plunge. Now Harding did not want a bright morning conversation. His mind was busy with the details of the day's work. The catalogue that he was preparing, the cheap lot of books that had come in yesterday and would, most of them, find their way into the sixpenny box outside, and the chances of discovering some unexpected find that would add glory to the aforementioned catalogue: such questions as these made a morning conversation with a stranger extremely irritating, and Harding was English enough to suspect at once of the most abominable crimes anybody who spoke to him without a proper Ealing introduction.

This large man was, in Harding's view, exactly the person of whom you would expect a crime. On the first morn-

ing the large man had insisted on walking with Harding to the station, he talked in a great booming voice about the weather, about the neighbouring music hall and a dainty little piece who was dancing there, about some shares he had somewhere, about his being a widower, about some geraniums in his back garden, about some horses, about indigestion, and about where he was going for his summer holiday. All these things before they reached the station at all. Then in the train he sat next to Harding, might indeed be said to sit over him, and went on with a long cheerful proclamation about potatoes and beans and cabbages, shouting it all out at the top of his voice in rivalry with the noisy train. If there was one thing in the world that Harding detested it was talking against a train, he himself having a rather small, shrill voice which was not at its best when it was unduly raised, as he very well knew. Then this horrible man stuck closely to him at Hammersmith, marched down the platfrom with him, pushed past the ticket collector, marched up the other platform, and sat over him once again in the Tube. He went all the way with him to Leicester Square and would, Harding believed, have followed him to his bookshop had he not managed to lose the fellow in the crowd. Work was spoiled for Harding that day. Whenever he tried to think clearly that man's booming voice seemed to get in the way, his large, bushy black moustache seemed to whisk up and down the bookshelves, and his broad, aggressive chest overshadowed the customers.

Harding had not been encouraging, but nevertheless, next day, there was the man again, darting down the steps with a "Well, good-morning, good-morning, how are we to-day?" so that Harding, who detested to be called "we,"

was so deeply annoyed that he murmured that he had forgotten something, hurried back to his house again, and was twenty minutes late at the bookshop.

This was how it began, and every day now the poor little man was overshadowed by this horrible stranger. This horrible man's name was Tonks, and he had something to do with vegetables. He had no children and was thinking of marrying again, but couldn't quite make up his mind. He gave his reluctant companion most unpleasant and intimate details of his earlier married life. He had an especially disagreeable habit of putting his hand on little Harding's shoulder. The really strange thing was that Tonks seemed to have no particular liking for any other of the numerous company who went down to the City at that same hour day by day. There were, as Harding complained, any number of men who would have been delighted with Tonks' confidences, but Tonks appeared to wish to have none of them, and Harding, being a modest little man, could only explain this as a quite definite persecution, deliberately indulged in by Tonks for his own especial annoyance.

Now the passion of Harding's life was his bookshop. He thought about it all day, slept with it all night, ate it at every meal, and was never so happy as when he was imagining wonderful plans for its future. These plans were not really of a literary kind. His vision and dream was an enormous shop containing thousands and thousands and thousands of volumes. Room succeeded room, rows and rows of bookshelves towered up into the mysterious mists of the ceiling. There were so many books that nobody knew how many there were, nor ever would know, and with this sense of size and multitude went also a keen

pleasure in what may vulgarly be called "spotting the winner." Harding never went to horse races; as he once explained to a friend, he did his horse racing in the bookshop.

This was just at the time when there was a passion, both in America and in England, for modern first editions, and Harding had a special catalogue of modern firsts of which he was immensely proud. This catalogue might have been better, and he would certainly have made more money had he gone in for quality rather than quantity, but he loved his catalogues to be large and full of important names. He had a list of modern writers, and used to mark them up and down in this list week by week according to the value of the moment. At one time it would be, we will say, Drinkwater and De la Mare who were going to win the literary stakes, and his modern catalogue that quarter would be full of Drinkwaters and De la Mares, a great many of them of no value at all, but he would put little mystical notes under the items, like "Very scarce" or "Rare in this state," and then hope for the best. Nothing pleased him so much as when somebody came into his shop, asked for some tawdry novel, and was then lured by him into consideration of rare firsts. He loved to see them open their eyes in wide amazement as he explained to them the wonderful speculation that investing in these mysterious Drinkwaters would be, of them going up week by week, that somebody in his shop had bought two years ago a little slim Masefield for almost nothing at all, and that now ten pounds wouldn't buy it. Ladies might be seen going from his shop with a little bundle of mysterious poets when they had intended to purchase only a very unmysterious story to read in the train. Had this been all,

he might truly be said to be encouraging a love of real literature among the masses, but unfortunately those same ladies very often returned at a later date with the same mysterious poets under their arm, expecting him very naïvely to give them an increased price for these same writers and being greatly indignant when they found that these books had gone down rather than up.

Nothing is perhaps more curious in ordinary life than the way in which somebody who has perhaps a very remote connection with ourselves and our affairs creeps in upon our consciousness and dominates it. I remember once staying with a man in a fine country house, surrounded by a magnificent park, shut off most securely from all the world, and worried almost to death by the personality of a certain butcher in a neighbouring village. He didn't even get his meat from the man; he was simply conscious of him, of his red face, his stout body, his blood-stained knife, and this man interfered so seriously with his happiness that he sold his house and went elsewhere. That is an extreme case, I dare say, but we must all of us be able to remember times when we have been affected in something of this fashion.

Mr. Tonks crept in upon the consciousness of Mr. Harding very slowly. Mr Harding could not really be said to be a very imaginative man. He had only an imagination about the possible size of his bookshop. With regard to his own daily affairs he was very practical and sensible. Nevertheless, he found himself after a week or two hesitating before he took his walk to the station. Would Tonks be there springing down the steps towards him? Would his cheery laugh ring through South Ealing? Would

Harding this time be ahead of him? He noticed soon that he did not move off to the station with his accustomed alacrity, that he paused a little in his bit of garden, and that once or twice he peered down the street to see whether there were anyone there. He began to have a physical feeling about Tonks, as though he were an egg ever so slightly bad, or a bird just a tiny bit too high. He contemplated the possibility of reaching the station by some other route. He thought that perhaps it would be almost as quick to go from Ealing Broadway, but, as a matter of honest fact, he knew that it would not. Then he concocted for himself an elaborate conversation with Tonks: how he said to him, very politely, "Good-morning," how they started off to the station together, and how on the way he explained very gravely but with the utmost politeness that it was quite essential for him to have absolute silence on his journey down to Charing Cross Road because there were so many business problems that only that morning hour before the morning rush could solve. He saw himself then bowing to Mr. Tonks, saying that he hoped that he understood, that no kind of offence was intended, and that if there was one person in the world with whom he would like to talk at that moment it was Mr. Tonks, but that, in fact, there must be nobody at all. Harding thought this all out very carefully, and it seemed to him that there was nothing whatever to prevent him from carrying out his desire. There was, in fact, nothing to prevent him except that the words would not come. Something tied him when he saw Mr. Tonks, just as though a seal had been placed on his lips, and this made him more irritated than ever. "I should have thought," he complained angrily to himself, "that the follow could see I don't want him. I surely make

it plain enough." However, the fellow did not see, and Mr. Tonks became more and more amiable, more and more voluble, was ever more and more persistently there.

The next stage in the proceedings was that Harding dreamed about Tonks. He was not a man who dreamed very often; only occasionally, when he had had a late supper, he fell, screaming, from an enormous height, and he did occasionally dream about somebody coming into his shop with a first *Pilgrim's Progress*, in perfect condition, and offering it to him for sixpence, but he was on the whole most definitely not a dreamer. One night he saw Tonks standing in his room in his nightshirt. The vision was so vivid, the smile on Tonks's face so real, the nightshirt so exactly what in real life it would be, that it was hard to believe it was a dream. "What have you come here for?" he asked angrily. "I'm never going to leave you again," the figure replied. Poor Harding woke with a scream. Then the dream came quite frequently. There were different aspects of it. The worst was when Tonks' naked feet could be heard padding up the stairs. Then there was a pause outside the bedroom door, and Tonks' laboured breathing came like a whistle through the woodwork. Then the door slowly opened, and first Tonks's head was seen peering round, and then the whole big body came into view. Then the door was softly closed and Tonks stood there watching. Always Harding said the same thing—"What have you come here for?" and Tonks said, "I'm never going to leave you again."

There suddenly came a week when Tonks did not appear—no sign of him at all. Harding absolutely sighed with relief. Perhaps Tonks had gone away. Perhaps he was

on a holiday and would be drowned in the sea or ridden over by a motor car. Perhaps he had committed some crime and left the country. At any rate, for a week he disappeared, and Harding was astounded and secretly irritated to find that towards the end of the week he missed him quite seriously, just because to have somebody so thoroughly to dislike seemed to give piquancy to the work of the day, but, lo and behold! there on Monday morning was Tonks again, hurrying down the steps with his, "Well, well, how are we, then, to-day?" and then going on to explain that he had had a horribly bad cold, that his throat had hurt him something terribly, and his inside not been at all the thing. On that day Harding could have killed him, and he did manage to say as they drew near to the station, "Look here, I've got to think something out. Let me be quiet, won't you?" to which Tonks, who had been sneezing hysterically all down the road, replied through his cold-invaded nose, "All right, old feller; forgive my sneezing, won't you? Terrible things to get rid of, colds."

The next stage of this affair was that Tonks' personality invaded the shop. It can only have been hysteria on the part of Harding, and he was most certainly very far from being an hysterical person, but one morning, opening the door of the shop, stepping in, sniffing as he invariably did the aroma of old decaying books, the beautiful scent of piled-up dusty volumes, it seemed to him that Tonks had followed in after him. He whisked sharply around, but of course there was no one there, but for half a moment he could have sworn that out of the tail of his eye he saw the heavy shoulder, the rough red of the cheek, the beginning of that hateful smile.

"That man's getting on my nerves," he said to himself. "I really must refuse to think of him any longer." But he could not help himself. There was something about Tonks as though he had been Frankenstein's monster of Harding's own creation. Harding, like all Englishmen, was, underneath his British exterior, a desperately sentimental man. A little of a sycophant, too, something of a crawler, and the odd thing was that if he had met Tonks just a little differently—that is, on a convivial evening at the house of a mutual friend—he might have liked him very much indeed, so close are love and hatred to one another. As it was, he hated him, and every day with increasing fervour. He was perhaps working too hard, bothering himself too strenuously about his new catalogue. Perhaps he was taking too little exercise and eating things that did not agree with him. Whatever the explanation, certain it is that Tonks' shadow was always now appearing at the shop, hiding behind the counter, squeezing itself in between the covers of books, balancing itself precariously on ladders, always turning up in the most unexpected places. And then one day came the climax. Tonks did make a real appearance in the true flesh. He came in one morning about midday, sauntering in, one hand in his pocket, smiling all over his face. Harding was alone in the shop at the time.

"Well, well, how are we?" he called out. "I've caught you in your lair at last. You never would tell me where you worked, and I've had to find it out for myself."

So he'd been spying on him? Harding's face crimsoned. He had to bend over a book that he was examining to hide his agitation. Yes, he'd been spying on him, the beast!

Tonks waited a moment for a reply, and getting none,

went on most genially, "Well, well, I'm sure you're busy to-day. I've come in to buy a book from you."

"What sort of a book?" said Harding, almost in a whisper.

"Well, it's for a young lady friend of mine, and she's taking a long journey up to the north of Scotland and wants something to read. 'Why,' I said to her, 'I know the very man. He's a great friend of mine and very clever, and I'll ask him to advise me.'"

Harding suddenly looked up and leaned across the counter, his face pushed forward. The two men were very close to one another.

"I'm not your friend," he said, "and I'll have you know it. I hate the very sight of you. I've been wanting to tell you this a long time."

The smile suddenly left Tonks' face as though it had been snatched away by somebody standing behind him. His eyes were wide with surprise.

"Well, I never!" he said. "Do you really feel like that about me? I wonder why?"

"Never mind why," said Harding furiously. "The fact's true, and that's enough. *You've* been irritating me for months, walking along to the station with me, only I haven't had the courage to tell you so. I should have thought a man would have seen it."

He bent down, his face still crimson, staring into his book. The puzzled expression deepened on Tonks' countenance. His whole body seemed to grow puzzled too. His waistcoat developed new creases, his hands seemed to wrinkle. Then his great chest heaved a mighty sigh.

"It's strange," he said. "I wonder if you know anything against me? Not that there is much against me that I can

think of, but it's curious, because I took a liking to you. A great liking to you. Most unusually quick it was. At the very first sight of you, as one might say. I suppose I'm slow to notice things, but there's never been a man I'd have liked for a friend so much as I've liked you. There's something about you sort of appeals to me. I suppose you couldn't explain a little?"

"No, I couldn't," said Harding ferociously. "I just don't like you, and that's all there is about it. We're better apart, if you'll excuse me for saying so."

"Oh, I'll excuse you," said Tonks, shaking his head slowly, pulling himself together; "but it's a pity—a terrible pity. I'm a lonely sort of man. Being a widower's a bit difficult, because, you see, if you've liked the first woman it's most improbable you're going to be pleased with the second, and if you haven't liked the first woman, why, you're off matrimony altogether, so to speak. If you understand what I mean. I'm sort of lonely in that house. I've been wanting to ask you in for weeks past. I've got an organ in the dining room you'd love to hear. It's as good as a church. You've never seen my dog, have you?"

"No, I haven't," said Harding, "and don't want to."

"Well, well," said Tonks slowly, "that's the end of that. I'm glad I've got the dog, though," he said, as he went out of the shop.

There began after this an even worse period for Harding, because, although Tonks never actually met him now on the way to the station, never spoke to him, indeed, he was always just round the corner. Harding could never pass his house without feeling sure he was hiding behind the dining-room curtain and longing to rush out and speak to him. At

Hammersmith their paths were sometimes crossed, and then Tonks had a mixture of pride and pleading on his large round face that was terrible to see. Harding had now a curious sense that in one way or another he was in the wrong. Absurd, of course, but there you are. He only hated the man the more for it. The man became a proverb in his mind. When he was talking with his friends he would quote him as an instance of the depth of his feeling. "There's a man I know," he would say, "whom you wouldn't believe the way I hate, and I really couldn't tell you why. Just his face or his smile or something. Case of Dr. Fell, I suppose. Really gives me the creeps. You might say there's nothing against him, and yet in a way there is. His being alive's against him, if you understand what I mean." And then all the friends would laugh together and say that they understood perfectly.

There was one morning a most difficult moment when Tonks came down the steps with his dog, the most hideous mongrel you ever saw, a kind of fox terrier with a black spot on its nose, and one ear half bitten off in a dog fight. The awkward thing was that the dog leaped upon Harding as though he were an old, old friend.

"Come 'ere, Spot, come 'ere!" Tonks called out, looking extremely embarrassed, but Spot persisted in claiming Harding for an old friend. He simply wouldn't leave him alone. The two men stopped and looked at one another, and Harding had the most curious feeling, as though he would like to go up and embrace Tonks and put his hat straight. A most curious and un-British feeling, as everybody will allow, and Tonks and the dog went one way and Harding went another. Bah! how he hated that man! Why couldn't he go and live somewhere else? Nevertheless,

all the way to the shop, he felt ashamed of himself and couldn't settle down to anything for the rest of the day.

Three days later, about six in the evening, he was returning home. He left the shop a little earlier than usual, because it was so fine and pleasant. He wanted to get into his little garden and do some digging. He got out at South Ealing Station and walked briskly down the road homewards.

Outside Tonks's house there was an agitation. Several people were hanging about and a policeman was looking into space.

"Excuse me, constable, is there anything the matter?" asked Harding.

"Gentleman been run over by a motor omnibus," said the policeman. "Just round the corner here. No use taking 'im to the 'ospital. 'E's done for."

"Done for!" gasped Harding.

"Dead as mutton," said the policeman. Harding turned white. It was as though he himself had killed him.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the policeman. "Are you a friend of the gentleman?"

"Why?" asked Harding.

"Why, because 'e don't seem to 'ave anybody in the house who does belong. Nobody but an old woman who comes in and does for 'im, and a dawg. The dawg won't leave 'is bed. Must 'ave been a lonely sort of life for a man."

"Yes, I am a friend of his," said Harding suddenly, "a very great friend."

He pushed past the policeman and went into the house. There was a doctor there, an old woman crying, the dog

sitting on his hindquarters at the foot of the bed and not moving. There was Tonks himself in a nice clean nightshirt with his hair brushed, looking very calm and quiet, a suggestion of a smile hovering about his mouth.

"Caught him in the stomach," said the doctor. "Instantaneous. Are you a friend of the deceased?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," said Harding, "a great friend."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be anybody else," said the doctor. "Must have been a lonely sort of life."

The old woman sobbed. "Oh, 'e was a kind gentleman," she said.

"I was his best friend," said Harding. "We used to go into town together every morning. I'll see to everything.'

He did. For weeks he worked at Tonks' affairs, which were in a curiously complicated state. There seemed to be no relations. In the end, when everything was sold and all debts paid, there were a few hundred pounds, and these Harding gave to the old woman. No one seemed to question for a moment that Harding was Tonks' best friend. The action of the dog only confirmed it. He refused to go near anyone save Harding. Harding had to take him home to live with him.

"No, he's not much of a dog," he would say, "but, you see, his master was my best friend, so there you are."

And the funny part of it all was that that was true.

THE ENEMY IN AMBUSH

I

CAPTAIN JOHN FORD lodged, in Moscow, with the family Ivanoff. He had been directed by the English Consulate to the family Ivanoff, the lady of the house being used to officers, the flat being in a pleasant part of the town (Krivvarbatsky Pereonlok, D. II. k.s.), and the food "simple but excellent." He had arrived with a great many boxes at the beginning of September and (of course, he did not realize this) Mme Ivanoff's heart had sunk when she saw him. She had had English officers in her house now for fifteen years, but she had never seen anyone so alarming as Captain John Ford. He was handsome but stiff as a deal board. His clothes were surely made of iron, such creases were there in the trousers, so severe were the sleeves of his jacket: he was very tall and very thin, with eyes like cold blue stones, a brown moustache that expressed in its every hair haughty and contemptuous surprise, and black shining boots that showed her, poor woman, that before many days were over Masha would incur his severest displeasure.

She would have liked to say that her rooms were all occupied, but she had just then no one at all and needed the money. She looked at his healthy, tanned, and self-satisfied countenance, and her knees trembled. However, Mme Ivanoff was a brave woman. She thought of Kostia,

of Anna, of little Vladimir. . . . She said that she was delighted to see him.

II

Captain Ford's first impression was that he couldn't have believed there could have been such a country. Certainly the weather during the first days towards the end of September was not propitious. It rained very often; the mud rose higher and higher in the streets; on many days a thick heavy pall hung over the place and everyone walked with bent shoulders, as though they dreaded a blow. The houses seemed to be made of papier-mâché, the towers of gold and blue and green were cheap and tawdry, and the noise of the clanging trams was deafening. The isvoschiks splashed mud over Captain Ford's trousers, and officious people were always attempting to take his coat, hat, and stick away from him when he wished to retain them. No one walked on the right side of the street, church bells were always ringing when he wanted to slumber. At the opera he was late and had to stand in the passage during a whole act, he tumbled continually over holes in the pavement, and was kept waiting in his bank two hours before they gave him his money.

"I simply couldn't have believed such a country possible," he said to himself again and again. . . .

Then the Ivanoff family was like nothing that he'd ever known. Mme Ivanoff herself, soft and fluffy and plump with eyes that were always filling with tears, and the prettiest broken English, had been in the opinion of many English officers "a dear little woman." They wrote to her long after they had left her and told her that one day they would come back to live in Russia. She treasured their

letters in a box that one of them had given her with "A Present from Brighton" in red paint on the lid. But Captain Ford simply found her irritating. She was frightened with him, and when she gave him lessons in the morning lost her head, forgot her English, and sometimes even her Russian.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand you," his moustache would say to her.

"Oh! How say it in Engleesh? What is that word—yes? You know—'appy, merry, gay—no, not gay. Ah—*Tak!*" and he would wait with a terrible patience, staring just over her head at the ikon in the corner of the room.

Then she was certainly absent-minded and believed that good-nature was of more value than sharpness of intellect. She simply wanted life to be pleasant for everyone and was never happier than when six stout ladies of her acquaintance came early in the afternoon, and played lotto with her until dinner time. Her husband also wished life to be pleasant. He was an inventor who had, many years ago, had considerable success with a patent clip that held papers for you with an iron clasp above your writing table. Since then he had invented many things—boot polish, a new way of peeling oranges, a game with horses and counters, a book rest and a collapsible chair that became an umbrella stand when you had sat upon it long enough. Only the paper clip had been really successful, but he lived in great hope and was one of the most cheerful people in Moscow except at sudden moments of utter despair, when he loudly proclaimed his disdain of God, and told the cook (very much a friend of the family) that he intended to commit suicide before nightfall. He was a little man with a red moustache and large blue baby eyes—he was sen-

timental and absolutely credulous; he believed anything that anyone told him.

The children, Kostia, Anna, and Vladimir, were just like other children, loved their parents but only occasionally obeyed them, made a tremendous noise, cried and laughed and sang. Kostia, however, was now a boy of fourteen and was beginning to regard life seriously. He read the newspaper, was often grave and silent, and patronized his father. But the most remarkable member of the family was Uncle Anton, Mr. Ivanoff's brother. Some people might have said that he was not quite right in his head, but all eccentricities were forgiven him for his "remarkable ideas."

"What kind of ideas?" said Captain Ford suspiciously when Mme Ivanoff first told him this.

"Wonderful things," said Mme Ivanoff, "about Russia, and God, and the Soul of Man."

"Really!" was all Captain Ford said.

Uncle Anton was remarkable to look upon, a giant of a man with a long brown untidy beard, shaggy brown eyebrows, and a mop of utterly uncared-for hair. He was dirty and shabby and sometimes not quite decent in his appearance. He ate his food in a horrible manner, blew his soup all over the table, and gnawed bones in his hands like a savage. What Captain Ford thought of these things may be imagined—no consolation to him that Uncle Anton loved humanity and would walk a mile rather than tread on a worm—no consolation at all. But the worst of it was that Uncle Anton took, from the first, a great liking to Captain Ford. "Here is a proper man," he said, "a man to whom I can talk," and talk to him he did. It was one of Mme Ivanoff's hardest tasks to keep Uncle Anton out of

Captain Ford's room. "He has other interests," she would tell her brother-in-law. "He is different from us."

"All men are the same," Uncle Anton replied, smiling down upon her. "We are all brothers. My heart is warm towards him."

Indeed, at first, the hearts of all the family were warm; they were prepared absolutely to make Captain Ford one of themselves. But Captain Ford did not like vodka, hated Schee, could not touch little cucumbers, and had a real terror of Rabcheek. He watched with paralyzed fascination little Vladimir's manner of mastication. Uncle Anton's preoccupation with a chicken bone paled the soldier's bronzed cheek.

Then he had never, at any time, been a great conversationalist. He had always distrusted talkers, and one of his favourite dicta was: "If you've got something you want to say, just think first as to whether it's really worth while. You're sure to find it isn't." The Ivanoffs certainly never thought first. They said exactly what came into their heads, talking all together, screaming and shouting if necessary, happy and friendly and merry. Mme Ivanoff soon discovered that Captain Ford disliked noise at meal times, and she did her best—but unfortunately her memory was short, she was easily excited, and her apologies afterwards seemed to give him very little pleasure. Other Englishmen had smiled at the noise and confusion. Captain Ford looked as though he were called on by his country to perform an especially hazardous and unpleasant duty. It was evident to anyone that he was not happy. There were many other little things. He wanted a cold bath every morning, and that shou'd have been simple enough, but the taps were eccentric, the water was some-

times brown and thick, the catch would not fasten on the bathroom door (upon one occasion when the Captain was in his bath Uncle Anton entered, and, instead of retiring, proposed that they should have a bath together). Then there was the matter of "the wash." In England this was a prefectly regular affair. You sent your washing on Monday and received it back again on Friday; but here, whatever you might do or say, "the wash" had its own habits and customs. Frequently the arrival of Prazniky would delay things for a fortnight or so. Masha would be sent to the laundry with orders to die rather than return without the Captain's collars. Nevertheless, she did return without them; she had had a wonderful conversation with the head of the laundry—he was an agreeable man and hoped by next Tuesday or Wednesday to have discovered most of the Captain's things.

"You see what it is—*on nas*," said Mme Ivanoff, smiling happily.

"But, good God!——" cried the Captain.

He shut himself then into an impenetrable reserve, and the family regarded him with frightened eyes. He felt their terror and was irritated by it. He flung himself into the learning of Russian with a ferocity and pertinacity that were devastating. He was not very clever, but of an amazing doggedness. His accent was appalling, but he never made a mistake in grammar. It promised to be a dismal winter for the Ivanoffs. . . .

III

Then, a few weeks before Christmas, Captain Ford discovered that something was the matter with him. The weather improved. The snow had fallen, and there came a

succession of shining crystal days when the colours of the sky were reflected in shadowed lights on the white ground, when the towers of gold and green and blue hung, on misty evenings, like rounded clouds about the stars, when the eccentric shapes and patterns of the Moscow streets were romantic roads leading into mysterious countries, when every ugliness took on beauty and every commonplace comer seemed to watch with a smile, half-hidden, half-pathetic, half-expectant. Captain Ford was uncomfortable. Entirely against his will he began to think of his young days when he had loved a lady in the Gaiety chorus, had thought her a model of virtue and modesty, had even written poetry to her. There had indeed been a summer night when he had driven her out to Hampstead in a hansom, and had appealed to the moon to witness his devotion. Ah! how he had laughed at himself since then, and what fools other young fel ows with an equal romantic folly had seemed to him. There had been a moment, after his marriage with Mrs. Ford, when he had been threatened with some return of this same nonsense. It had been Mrs. Ford herself then who had laughed at him: "Why, John!" she had cried (they were at Monte Carlo on their honeymoon), "I had no idea you'd got that kind of rot in you!"

Afterwards, with a shadow of that same idealism, he had hoped for a son, but Mrs. Ford had thought it unwise of them to start a family when their income was still so slender, and they had decided to wait. They were waiting yet.

Now, in spite of himself, Moscow was making him uncomfortable. When, late after some dinner party, he was driving home in his isvoschik, he would curse the cold and the bumping roads and the slowness of his horse, and behind that cursing there would be stealing a strange warm,

happy feeling of contentment as the white streets ran in lines of light through the dark, uneven walls. The watchmen's fires leaping at the street corners, the thin flames burning before the ikons, the Russian peace of that vast Russian night that covers so spacious and silent a land touching him with its cool hand, whispering to him with its friendly voice. By Christmas he had told himself that, if he did not take care, he would one day be making a fool of himself, he would be actually growing fond of the country. Now this fear of making a fool of himself was a very real terror indeed, and was perhaps all the stronger in him now because he had shut himself up so tightly these last months. Christmas Eve was a hard day for him in this fashion: he bought presents for the Ivanoff children (fine presents, too), but would not come to the Christmas Tree. They, however, emboldened by this happy excitement, came into his room and thanked him, and Vladimir (aged five) wished to kiss him. From this, fortunately he was prevented. Captain Ford was very stiff with them and seemed angry at their little speeches.

"Not at all. Not at all," he said. "Nitchevo. Nitchevo."

Then at supper the family gave him presents: Mme Ivanoff a copy of Tutchev's poetry, Mr. Ivanoff a Russian tobacco box, and Uncle Anton a little brass ikon. He was terribly embarrassed; he had nothing to say. "Thanks. Really—hum—*blagardaryoo vass*—hum—thanks." He wished with all his heart that he had arranged to dine that night with some English friends.

It happened then, in the early part of the year, that he saw performances at the Artistic Theatre of *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*. He was moved unexpectedly and, as he told himself, quite unreasonably. He had not

been at any time a student of the theatre, but he was used in England to a comfortable play that began at nine o'clock punctually, had a story that a baby could understand, with well-known performers in it, some of whom he knew in his club and others who came to have tea with his wife. Moreover, it was one of his theories that a play must not be depressing. "Worries enough," he would say to his friends, "in ordinary life, without your books and plays being worrying too. That's what *I* say"—and was apparently quite unaware that all his friends said the same thing. He had, then, no right to be anything but disgusted by *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*. Here were two plays depressing and inconclusive. Characters came in and out at their own pleasure, uttered remarks quite carelessly and without purpose, seemed to have no idea that they were in a play at all. At the end of the evening no one was settled for life—indeed, anyone who, at the beginning of the play, was settled, was seen to be unsettled by the end of it. Moreover, none of the actors looked like actors nor had, apparently, any consciousness that the play would fall to pieces if they were not in it. It was all desperately unlike anything of which Captain Ford could be expected to approve, and yet he discovered in himself an increasing consciousness of disturbed alarm. It was exactly as though he were reconnoitring in some enemy's country, was aware that a man, in ambush, was waiting for him and that every step might bring him leaping upon him. "One of these days I shall make a fool of myself if I'm not careful" . . . there was his enemy in ambush, an enemy serious enough in all conscience, because, having made a fool of one's self once, it is only too possible that one may do so again, and then again, and at last be a fool alto-

gether. In the love of Mme Ranevsky, of Gayef, for their house and orchard, in the burning passion of Musha and Verstenen that glows like a dark fire at the very heart of *The Three Sisters*, he found the footsteps, the very secret marks of his enemy. Had he missed the whole purpose and meaning of life? Had he driven from him everything that life was intended to give to the soul of man? At that thought he shook himself as though he would wake from an evil dream. What had he to do with the soul of man? Was he not an English officer and a man of practical common sense? He might as well be that drunken old idiot, Uncle Anton, at once. He was stiffer than ever with the Ivanoff family. . . .

But the worst of it was that Uncle Anton, whom it was impossible to rebuff, whose childlike trust and simplicity saw what they wanted to see and not what they were told to see, insisted on treating him as though he alone in real truth knew Captain Ford as, in the depths of his heart, he was.

"You love this country," he said standing over him and putting a big dirty hand on his shoulder. "You love this country. It is stealing every day more deeply into your heart. I know that this is so and that after you have left us you will long always to return. You will have a great hunger . . ." a ridiculous way for one man to talk to another.

It happened, then, that as the weeks of the new year increased Captain John Ford longed every day more passionately to escape. He hurled himself at his Russian and made remarkable progress. The Ivanoffs, with the exception of Uncle Anton, were now really afraid of him, and felt his stiff unfriendliness like a cloud about the

house. It could not be said that they awaited his departure with sorrow, nevertheless, in their way they were proud of him. "You never saw such an Englishman," they would tell their friends, "so proud and stiff. He never opens his lips. The children are so quiet you wouldn't know them—a fine man, a proper Englishman."

Then Mrs. Ford wrote to say that in the course of her travels she had reached Sebastopol, would travel home through Russia, and would pick him up on her way. "I'm sure you'll be glad to get home again," she said, "after all the queer people you've been seeing. . . ."

Why was it that, in reading her letter, he had the strangest feeling that his wife wasn't real? Oh, yes! He had certainly been out of England long enough. He waited with impatience and also with a strange anxiety his wife's arrival.

IV

Mrs. Ford arrived: she was a brisk little woman, who stood on her toes and pecked at the world like a bright, hard little bird. Very smart in her dress, the impression she gave was that she despised above everything else waste of time. She even clipped her sentences:

"Well, John, here I am. Leave to-morrow 10:30 Must. Promised the Andersons be back in time for the Anderson girl's wedding. Poor dear—how odd you look—want some new clothes."

Her evening meal with the Ivanoffs was a strange business. She talked brightly and sharply, looking just over Mme Ivanoff's shoulder. Mme Ivanoff hated her at the very first glance, which was odd, because Mme Ivanoff never hated people. The whole family hated Mrs. Ford,

and she remained for many years after in the minds of the Ivanoff children as a picture of dreadful, devastating tyranny. Uncle Anton also disliked her so much that he would not speak at all during the meal and was heard to mutter to himself later in the evening: "My poor dear friend! My poor dear friend."

And this was the strangest part of it, that, in the light of the newly revealed Mrs. Ford, the Captain, who had been throughout the winter a terror and a depression, was suddenly a victim. The Ivanoff family discovered that it had really loved him all the time, and to allow him to be carried away in the charge of such a woman was a piercing tragedy. He was going away to-morrow! Why, they would miss him! They were not sure that they were not prouder of him than of any Englishman that they had ever had. Upon that evening there was developed a sudden intimacy, and Mme Ivanoff could not help looking at him with mysterious glances, and Ivanoff himself was grievously tempted to press his hand.

Meanwhile John Ford was in a strange condition. That impression that he had had on reading his wife's letter of her unreality oddly persisted. When she spoke to him he felt as though he were looking at something through a looking glass—take the glass away and the reflection went with it. She was like a memory that he didn't wish to remember or a photograph of a college cricketing team. Moreover, he knew, quite desperately, that he didn't wish to go to-morrow. That strange dread that had been creeping daily more close to him was now very near indeed.

"I *shall* make an awful ass of myself if I'm not careful," he said to himself, looking at his wife.

Before they parted for the night he looked at Uncle Anton and, with a shock of surprise, thought, "I believe he *is* the only man who's ever really known me!" He lay sleepless all night beside the unreal body of his wife; his foot touched hers, and it was as though someone had asked him to repeat the Latin verses that he used to learn when he was a boy at school. When the early dawn lit her face he felt a sudden impulse to get up and run for miles and miles into the very heart of Russia and there be lost.

He did not run—his training had been too thorough for that—but the parting in the morning was strangely moving. Mrs. Ford said good-bye briskly and with a bright air of relief because she would never see these appalling people again.

"Come, John, we shall miss our train."

The Captain stood, looking very English.

"I'm coming," he said.

He seemed to be waiting for her to start down the stairs, as though he had got something very special and private to say, but when she had gone, all he said was:

"Well, well, good-bye, Mrs. Ivanoff—very kind—yes. Well, well——"

He tipped the children; Uncle Anton made a rush to him, stopped halfway, rushed back and closed the door of his room. Captain Ford, with eyes that were for the first time in the experience of the Ivanoffs soft and human, made a dash for the stairs as though he were pursued.

"Good-bye . . . Good-bye . . . Good-bye," they cried.

They had hired a motor car, and Mrs. Ford was already sitting in it.

"Well, what people!" she said. "We've just nice time for the train."

The car had started when suddenly the Captain leaned out of the window and stopped it.

"I've forgotten something," he said to his wife.

He jumped out of the car, dashed down the street, and was through the door of the building. He rang the bell of the Ivanoff flat. Masha opened it; he pushed past her, and without knocking on the door, broke into Uncle Anton's room. Uncle Anton was standing, a huge figure, before his window peering down into the street.

He turned round.

"It's only," Ford, who was breathless, stammered, "that I hadn't—said good bye."

He held out both his hands. Uncle Anton took them, then kissed him gravely three times. Captain Ford, who had never before in his life been kissed by a man said, still breathlessly:

"I'm coming back. . . . I wanted you to know. . . . I'm coming back."

"Of course," Uncle Anton said.

He hurried away and was in the car again.

"But, John," his wife said, "whatever . . . ! The train. . . ."

He said nothing. He stared out of the window. The first warmth of spring was in the air. The streets were running with streams of water, blue from the reflection of the sky. The ikon above the gate in the Lubiansky Ploshet shone and glittered; the air seemed to be full of a noise of bells and hammers. The row of booths with their dolls and fruit, their hideous china ornaments, and their wooden toys were reflected with all their colours in the pools of water. John Ford drew a deep sigh. Then nodded to himself.

He knew that his enemy had made his spring, and he was glad.

THE DOVE

I

IN THE memoirs of the Slumber family that I hope, if life is spared to me, one day to publish, there will, I imagine, be very slight mention of Percy Alderness-Slumber. Probably no mention at all. And this simply because there are so many Slumbers and so many events of the first importance connected with their family affairs that a rather subordinate and colourless individual like Percy Slumber cannot naturally expect to play a principal part. Not that Percy Slumber ever did expect to play a principal part in anything save, possibly, on this one particular occasion that I am about to relate, and then, I fancy, his natural modesty forbade, from the plan's very first inception, too great expectations.

Percy was one of the Alderness-Slumbers, and, as anyone who studies his English social history of the last thirty years is aware, the Alderness-Slumbers have, owing to the sensational failure of Harcourt Alderness-Slumber in 1913, gradually slipped down into positions of genteel poverty. Once in the fifties and sixties of the last century they played no small part in the development of their country's welfare.

They are now, however, aware that, unless some genius is born unexpectedly to one of them, obscurity—a genteel obscurity—must be their lot for a long time to come.

Percy Alderness-Slumber found himself an orphan in the spring of 1918, his aged mother, who had long been a martyr to various dyspeptic disturbances, passing away in March of that year. Percy had been an only son and a loving and dutiful one. During the weeks that followed his mother's funeral he felt lonely and abandoned, but then, as the weeks extended into months, he was conscious of a vague freedom that at first he repelled as unfilial and rebuked as treacherous to a beloved memory. By the autumn of 1918, however, he was distinctly aware that he was his own master, only forty years of age, with a competence, small, perhaps, but nevertheless adequate for so moderate a nature as his. Free and his own master. Now what should he do with his freedom?

Percy's character was of the submissive kind. If human nature is to be divided into that familiar classification of boots and doormats, then Percy would belong unquestionably to the second of those divisions. He had been in fact so long dominated by his mamma, had for so many years obeyed her slightest wish, had during so many trembling hours feared her uncertain temper (dyspepsia is an aggravating complaint) that in all probability he greatly preferred to be dominated and felt chilly without some warm chastening from a superior power. This is the more odd in that the Alderness-Slumbers have been always noted for their arrogance. Percy was, as I have said, an only child, and Mrs. Alderness-Slumber was before her marriage a Beaminster, although of an inferior branch. This will be, for all discerning readers, explanation sufficient.

Had Percy been of a less diffident nature he would, in all probability, have married very shortly after his mother's

death. He was, however, not only diffident but also insignificant, and you had to look quite hard into every corner of any room in which you might happen to be to see whether Percy were there or not. He was not only plain, diffident, and insignificant; he was also as quiet in his movements as any mouse. He had been trained by his mother so to be.

Another of his troubles for which also his mother was responsible was that he found it very difficult to make up his mind. She had always made his up for him, and now that she was gone he stepped from intention to intention, first forwards and then backwards, as though those same intentions were irregular and slippery stones crossing the savage stream of life and he hesitating midway.

From 1918 to 1923 he thus hesitated, living in a very genteel boarding house in the Cromwell Road and behaving there with so mild an insignificance that even his landlady was scarcely aware as to whether he were truly her boarder or not.

It was in the early summer of 1923 that he read an article in the *Morning Leader* newspaper, which, although he little knew it at the time, was to determine the whole future course of his existence.

II

Before I go any further it would be well for me perhaps to attempt a slight physical portrait of my hero.

Percy Alderness-Slumber was a little man—that is, he was not more than five feet four inches in height, and all his features were small except, unfortunately, his nose. This large nose would have been, had he been able to have very active feelings about anything concerning himself, a

great grief to him, but his mother had, happily, with such determined frequency insisted that he was completely insignificant, unimportant, foolish, and negligible that he had long ago accepted this view as an obvious article of faith.

Nevertheless, he took trouble with his appearance, dressing always neatly, seeing that his clothes were pressed and wearing the freshest of linen, and had it not been for this large nose, his faintly sandy hair, and somewhat protuberant ears, he would have had a very agreeable appearance. As it was, people in the boarding house occasionally inquired, "Who was that neat-looking little man?" and it was really nobody's fault that nobody could answer the question.

I have already mentioned that as the vision of his mother faded into happy distance he felt, in the innermost recesses of his soul, that he ought to be doing something with his life. It was, I fancy, the Slumber blood in his veins that made him feel this, because whatever else you may urge against the members of the Slumber family (and many things have been urged against them), faint love of their country cannot possibly be one of them. It was just this that Percy increasingly felt—that he ought to do something—something, however slight—for his country.

One morning, sitting after breakfast in the pink and green drawing room of his lodging, the only other occupant of the apartment being that Miss Clarice Elder who was once engaged for a brief fortnight to Major General Buff-Etherington, a Crimean veteran, when cruel and vicious death (the General was seventy-eight years of age and a desperate martyr to gout) stepped in and separated them—alone then with Miss Elder, Percy was reading his *Morning Leader*.

I say HIS *Morning Leader*, because Percy, like so many of his fellow human beings, was so deeply attached to his morning paper that he felt exactly as though it were offspring of his own loins, chiding it, praising it, supporting it, dressing it in gay colours, indulging it on certain festal occasions with half-a-crown to buy toys with, and very frequently giving it the benefit of his parental opinion.

On this particular morning—the morning of March 13, 1923, he read the following paragraph from the first leader:

It is indeed apparent to ourselves that but little advantage to anybody is likely to accrue from these official investigations into the truth. Officials are, by the nature of their position, prejudiced persons, and Truth has always been shy of such. What we need is more evidence from that much-abused, marvellously patient individual, the man in the street. Let the man in the street spend a week or two in Germany, a month in France, talking to the other man in the street, the man in the restaurant, the man in the train, the woman at her cottage door; a few such conversations and we venture to assert that some remedy from this miserable and dangerous impasse will soon suggest itself to active minds. Such an unprejudiced observer may be compared by us to Noah's Dove, and we confidently believe that during his flight he will discover ground on which his feet may rest.

Like a flash of lightning in a dark room the words thundered in Percy's soul: "Thou art the Man."

As always when a message abruptly breaks one's peace so, he stared bewildered about the room, seeing the pink and green wall paper, the large Bringing in the Yule Log, and the two Japanese fans through a dim confusing mist. Even Miss Elder was not quite clear to him. Nevertheless, he pushed the paper across to her.

"Pray read that," he said. "The first leader." Miss Elder was astonished. She had not noticed that Percy was in the room. She read. At the end she looked up:

"Yes," she said.

Her indifference was nothing to him. His face was flushed as he rose. As always when he was agitated, his nose went a creamy white.

"There!" he said. "There!—something that at last I can do. Some way that I can serve my country."

He vanished from the room. Miss Elder shook her head. She was sorry for him as she was sorry for everyone who had ever lived, was living at the moment, or was likely to live.

It was her *métier*.

III

It was undoubtedly Percy's Beaminster rather than his Alderness-Slumber blood that led him so abruptly, so determinately, to take this step.

That had always been the Beaminster way, to feel so secure of their position that ordinary considerations, elements that to other, less self-confident persons would be considered deterrent, did not occur to them. Percy could not, in the ordinary things of life, be considered self-confident, but in this matter it was like a divine call—he heard the voice calling him and he went.

He went, knowing no German and little French, having but the slenderest means and a lamentable tendency to neuralgia. He went, trusting in his French and in the exchange. He went, after a difficult time with passports and a truly terrible journey to Munich. He left London at the beginning of June, paying his bill as silently as any ghost

and feeling a moment's shudder when he saw that there remained no balance at his bank when he had withdrawn his letter of credit. No more, then, until September. Ah, well, with the exchange he had surely enough for three months.

He stayed a month at Munich, on the whole, enjoyed himself, but could not be said to fulfil there the purpose for which he came. He scarcely spoke to anyone during his time there, having been desperately frightened during the first three days of his stay by the hours that he spent in the police station, attending to the requirements of the police. They were perfectly polite, but such crowds swarmed about him, so many strange sounds were hurled at his head, so many rough hands pulled him from place to place, so many hundreds of thousands of marks were finally demanded of him that, when it was all concluded, he retired to his hotel the merest whisper of a man.

It was a good hotel. He went there because they spoke English, and because, the exchange being what it was (and it varied from day to day, always, of course, to his advantage), he could not really be spending very much. The result of his stay there was that he spent more than he should, spoke only English, and learned to love Helles Beer. Nevertheless, he was convinced that he had noticed a good deal. The time had very nearly arrived when he could write to the *Morning Leader* reminding them of their leading article and offering them a few first fruits of his investigations.

It is true that at present his conclusions varied from day to day, but that was, after all, only as it should be did he have an independent and open mind.

Walking, for instance, one morning along the Briennerstrasse a woman of very genteel bearing stopped and

begged of him. That shocked him, and he was minded to return at once to his hotel and pen a violently anti-French epistle, but then, on the next evening, he went out to the Ausstellung and watched the citizens of Munich eating their sausage, drinking their beer, and singing their songs, and decided that, after all, the Germans had not had sufficiently impressed upon them the enormities of which in 1914 and the successive years they had been guilty.

He made only one friend during his stay in Munich, and he was, unfortunately, an Englishman. He was a retired major who was living in Germany because it was cheap. He occupied his time in cursing at the top of his voice the "damned Germans," and Percy was always afeared, in a public place, that some fracas would result. No one, however, paid the least attention. He fascinated Percy, and he had also a homely attraction for him because of the close resemblance, allowing, of course, for differences of age and sex, that the Major bore to his own lamented mother. Percy was always happier with those who dominated him, and the Major dominated him completely, cursing him without let or stay from morning to night and, at the last, borrowing five pounds of him with the greatest affection.

It could not be said that the Major very strongly prejudiced Percy's views; the Major spoke too emphatically to be trusted. He did, however, say one thing that, little as either of them knew it at the time, was to determine Percy's future life.

"You should see Switzerland," said the Major, "and stop at Stuttgart on your way through to Zurich. Interesting town Stuttgart."

Percy made inquiries and found that, whether he wished

it or no, see Switzerland he must. The Ruhr districts were closed for travellers. Very well. Very good. He would be compelled, however, to live most economically in Paris. Very economically indeed. How he hated to lend the Major five pounds, and how he admired the Major for demanding it! He paid his bill—millions of marks by this time—and said farewell to the Major, and a few hours later was in the picturesque town of Stuttgart at the hostelry known as Marcquardt.

IV

He at once liked the Marcquardt, and on further investigation liked Stuttgart.

He wandered about the streets through the sunny afternoon, liking the gabled roofs, the swinging signs, the cobbled ways. He also bought several things that he did not really need—a pencil case, two etchings of Stuttgart, and four silk ties—because he understood that you were not allowed to take with you more than a very small sum across the frontier. It would be all right. He could cash the remainder of his letter of credit in Zurich.

He went to bed early, because his train was early—nine o'clock precisely. He felt a little uncomfortable in the Marcquardt. The officials were perhaps not very friendly. He timidly left orders that he was to be called at half-past seven next morning. He awoke at six, and by the time that the man was banging on his door was dressed and ready.

He went down and had coffee and an egg. Then he asked for his bill and on receiving it and reading it, cold water trickled down his spine. It was twice as large as he had expected. They had said that his room would be This. On the contrary it was That, and That was exactly the double

of This. He inquired nervously, apprehensively. Very sorry. Waving of hands. Bowing. A polite and cruel smile. As the exchange alters in the night, so do the prices. Yesterday was not to-day nor, in all probability, would to-day be to-morrow. No. Quite so.

Well, thank heaven, he had enough. But only just enough. And he also had his ticket. How lucky that he had securely purchased it in Munich!

He hurried to the station, through the hall gleaming with imitation marble, up the broad stone steps, then to the gates leading to the platform. Through which gate must he pass? Apparently through none of them. They were all tightly closed. There was No. 9 and No. 12. On No. 9 the train was forty minutes late and on No. 12 fifty. He inquired of an official. No. 9 apparently went to Zurich. He had then forty minutes to wait.

They had told him at the hotel that the porter would bring his luggage and would meet him on the platform by the train. It sounded simple enough, and he went now to the top of the wide stone steps, sat on the broad shining balustrade, having below him the whole wide entrance to the station in his view; no one could go in or come out but he must perceive him. He could not miss the hotel porter.

He sat there, then, happily enough, to wait his forty minutes. Poor Percy! Had he but known it, they were to be the last happy minutes of his life!

As he sat there and as the moments passed, human beings flooded into the station. From his height he could watch everything as an Olympian god. And indeed he felt a real pride in his position. Here he was, neat, tidy, and cool, aloft, taking notice of these strange, bewildered, frantic foreign people just as the *Morning Leader* had advised

him to do. The series of letters that he would begin in Switzerland would be extremely interesting. . . .

Strange, frantic, and bewildered these people were! He had never before seen such confused and confusing mobs! It was Sunday morning, and the whole population of Stuttgart was rushing into the country—bands of boys and young men with Tyrolean hats, rosettes in their coats, rucksacks on their backs and staves in their hands, singing to the full extent of their lungs; families, father, mother, three, four, five children with attendant dogs; pieces of family urgently desiring to be joined to other pieces of family; long restless queues outside the ticket windows; fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, friends, and relations screaming and shrieking, shrieking and screaming; children crying; porters pushing here and there with their luggage; tourists bawling at strangers and strangers bawling at tourists; young men almost naked, brown as berries, yodelling as they went; pretty girls smiling vaguely, ugly girls looking anxiously; and through them all, impervious to noise, indifferent to jolting bodies, an old man with a large watering can scattering the stairs with water.

All this Percy watched, and felt proud and happy at his aloofness. How noisy, how hot, how confused they all were, and how fine was he! He looked up at the clock, and alarm smote him. The train must be in! Where was the porter? He looked anxiously everywhere, but his bags were invisible. Of course! How stupid! The porter was to meet him on the platform of the train!

His heart thumping, he rushed along, himself now one of that confused, pushing, shouting, perspiring mob that so lately he had despised. He joined the crowd that sweated about Gate No. 12. Right for Zurich? Yes! Right for Zurich.

A kind porter in broken English explained. Going in five minutes. His ticket was clipped. He rushed up the platform. Nowhere his porter! Nevertheless he must get his seat. He fought his way over and under bodies blocking the corridor to the only first-class carriage, sat down in it, mopped his brow, looked out of the window. His porter. Oh, WHERE is his PORTER? His PORTER! He looks out, up, and down, down and up. Out through, over and under the bodies he fights his way once more! WHERE is his porter? WHERE his bags? He runs up and down, here, there, everywhere. No porter. No porter anywhere. Good heavens! The train is going! A whistle blows! Someone shouts! The train is going! The train is moving! The train is gone!

V

For the first time for many many years Percy was angry —furiously angry. What an abominable thing. The hotel had forced him to miss that train, and the hotel should pay.

Soaked now in a bath of perspiration, he hurried down the stone steps and into the fresh air, up the street, and once more into the Marcquardt. Here he faced the austere and severe officials. Their superb indifference really did raise in him a tempest of rage such as even his mother, had she been present, would have admired. He screamed, he shrieked, he stamped with his feet; he invoked the power and might of Great Britain, at which the officials became even more austere and severe. They were polite but aloof, even as the snow-clad Jungfrau is aloof from the trembling mountaineer. They explained to him that certainly the porter *had* been there with the luggage, that he, Mr. Slumber, must, they were regretfully sure, have been on

the wrong platform, and that they would send a boy back with Mr. Slumber to the station to inquire.

Back, head up, scornfully striding, with the boy silent at his side, went Percy to the station. They met the porter halfway. Percy began in a rage, but ended in an apologetic and almost sycophantic strain. It was true. He had been on the wrong platform. There had been two trains to Zurich—one fast, one slow, he had got into the slow one. *Personen Zug*. Yes, naturally the porter had supposed him to be going by the other. . . .

Well, what was to be done? There was another train at three-thirty that afternoon. The porter would meet Percy at the top of the station steps at three o'clock. There could then be no mistake. Percy would be in Zurich at ten that evening. The porter and Percy, with many smiles, parted.

I must pass swiftly over the hours that intervened between their parting and Percy's return to the station. They were not happy hours for Percy, nor were they short. He had only a few thousand marks remaining to him, and could not therefore buy himself a meal. A soft and misty rain came down, and he moved, a shadow of a shade, among the deserted streets, and then, had he but known it, by a kind of prophetic instinct, up and down a street known as Jakobusstrasse, toiling, toiling, until at length he reached the wooded heights above the town where every tree was a dripping umbrella.

Punctually at three o'clock, hungry, weary, wet, and dirty but happily aware that in another half hour he would be leaving this ungrateful town, he was in his place at the top of the broad stairs. He spent there an agonizing ten minutes watching for the errant porter, who at length

appeared, apologetic and perspiring. Together they hurried to the cloakroom for the bags, slowly these were abstracted, together they hastened—now to Gate 14.

Yes, there it was, "Train for Zurich!" nor were the crowds now so confusing, so impatient, so pugnacious. Quite easily and comfortably Percy reached the ticket collector, and, with a timid smile on his supplicating face, handed up his ticket. The stout and plethoric ticket collector took it, looked at it, looked at it again, then, shaking his head, handed it back to Percy.

"Oh, what's the matter now?" said Percy in an agony to his attendant porter.

"He says," said the porter in his broken English, "ticket no good. Been through before. Hole in the ticket."

"Yes, but tell him," cried Percy, tears welling in his eyes, "that I only went through for a moment this morning and then because my luggage wasn't there I had to come back and——" He heard behind him the gathering swell of those waiting to catch their train.

"Oh, tell him, tell him," he cried. The porter spoke; the ticket collector shook his head; the porter spoke again; the ticket collector yet more vehemently shook his head. The tears now were blinding Percy's eyes. On every side of him rose a gale of curses, objurgations, and threats.

The porter dragged him from the mêlée; still smiling, he explained that Percy must go and visit a gentleman on the other side of the station and talk to him. . . .

"But meanwhile the train——!" cried Percy. There were yet five minutes.

They went to the other side of the station and explained. This time a long thin man with a long thin voice and a bad cold looked at Percy through long thin glasses and treated

him at once as one of the criminal classes. Percy, in an agony, wailed while the porter and the gentleman talked pleasantly together about the weather, how serious it was to have a cold at this time of the year, how abominable were the French, and when were the English going to take steps.

At length Percy's ticket was returned to him, he paid many thousands of marks and ran breathlessly back to Gate 14.

The train for Zurich had left two minutes before.

VI

He paid the porter the few thousand marks remaining to him, stored his baggage once more in the "Left Luggage," and wandered out into the wet Sunday afternoon, penniless and alone.

His case was not yet so desperate because after all he had the remainder of his letter of credit which to-morrow he could change, but he was terribly aware how small that remainder was. It was now early in July. His bank would never, in these suspicious post-war days, advance him money. No—he must live now with the very strictest economy. He realized for the first time how difficult it was to be a true observer of foreign life and manners when you must so persistently economize! How he regretted now that he had chosen the Bayrischer Hof in Munich and the Marcquardt in Stuttgart! Never mind, to-morrow he would be in Zurich; then he would be no longer puzzled by these confusing marks that leaped about him like wild animals in the jungle.

Meanwhile the rain reminded him that he was alone in Stuttgart without a penny and without a friend. He was

now so hungry that he could have eaten eels (his most detested food) had eels been there to eat. Until to-morrow morning he must starve.

He wandered and wandered, and then, drawn by a kind of irresistible attraction, started up Jakobusstrasse once more. Why? Destiny, in whose hands we are the veriest puppets, alone could answer. When, numb with damp and weariness, he had climbed the fiftieth flight of steps, a rather soiled placard in a window of a house on his left attracted him. In German it said that apartments were "to let," and in English "English spoken."

Had he not had so exhausting a day, had he not been starving and soaked to the skin, were he not, above all else, lonely of soul, the blood of the Beaminsters, the Aldernesses, the Slumbers would have held him back. But to hear English spoken! To be greeted once again in his beloved tongue! The temptation was too strong. He did not even attempt to combat it. He raised his hand and rang the bell.

After a very brief pause the door was opened and Percy Alderness-Slumber's fate was sealed for evermore.

A large, heavy woman, her black hair tousled as though she had been roused from sleep, her long hooked nose inquisitively projecting, her sallow and freckled complexion none the fresher for the flakes of powder that decorated it, asked him in German what he needed.

"I understand that you—someone—speaks English," stammered Percy.

"Come inside," said the lady.

VII

Percy explained his case very quickly. He was wet, hungry, homeless. He had at the moment no money, but

to-morrow morning he would be supplied, and to-morrow afternoon he would be leaving for Zurich. His bags were at the station. Would the lady trust him for one night?

The lady would. A smile, revealing two large rows of discoloured teeth, assured him. His hand was taken and shaken. She had a little room that would, she fancied, exactly suit him—only (and here she dropped her voice) he must pay her to-morrow morning in English money.

Would she give him some coffee and something to eat? She would indeed, and his bags should be sent for. She seemed a friendly woman, and her name was Frau Hulda Lowenthal.

Percy submitted. He submitted to everything. He ate his bread and sausage and drank his coffee. Finally, about six in the evening, he went to bed. There was nothing else to do except to sit up with Frau Lowenthal. He did not like Frau Lowenthal. He preferred to go to bed.

He spent a night of horror. Dream after dream swept down upon him, and they were all to the same effect, namely, that Frau Lowenthal had her hand upon him and would not let him go. It was but small consolation that the *Morning Leader* should appear to him in person dressed in a green and pink robe and assure him that he was having now unexampled opportunities as an observer. He wanted to go home.

He awoke in the morning with a head split from side to side, a throat like a nutmeg scraper, and a body now hot as chocolate sauce, now cold as the *bombe* that it envelops. He stayed in bed five days, five agonizing days, when Frau Hulda Lowenthal nursed him like a mother, watched over him like a sister, and at times revealed tendencies of a kind that had nothing either maternal or sororal about them.

Percy lay there, hating her more and more, but, as always, with his hatred went admiration for her dominating qualities. Nevertheless, she haunted him in his dreams, her hooked, birdlike nose, her black silk dress, her discoloured teeth, her dirty hands. . . .

She haunted him. He feared her. On the fifth day, trembling with weakness, his poor head reeling, he got up, dressed, found the kindly Cook, cashed the remainder of his letter of credit, bought a third-class ticket (he could no longer afford a better) to Zurich for the following day, and mounted slowly, slowly once again, and, as he hoped, for the last time, the heights of Jakobusstrasse.

Frau Lowenthal was a widow, and her damp, grimy, cockroach-ridden house contained apparently only one other lodger save Percy—the short, stout, amiable, uncleanly, only-German-speaking Herr Frederick Klopstock. Percy understood but little German, nevertheless, enough to understand that Herr Klopstock was an ally and supporter of the widow Lowenthal. Sometimes, indeed, it seemed to him that Herr Klopstock and Frau Lowenthal were engaged in some kind of plot together. They whispered. They winked. They significantly smiled. But what the plot could be Percy could not imagine. However, little did it matter. To-morrow, heaven be praised, would see him in Zurich.

That evening he told the widow that to-morrow morning at nine o'clock he would be catching the train. Might he have his bill? He thanked her for all that she had done for him. Certainly he should have his bill. What she had done for him was less than nothing.

The bill, presented to him at half-past seven next morn-

ing over his coffee, was certainly not "less than nothing." It was in English money and the largest he had ever seen. His cheek blanched as he looked at it. It had to be translated into the equivalent of German millions. Good heavens, did he pay it there would be almost nothing remaining of his tiny funds. Nothing remaining! But some of these charges were monstrous. He argued a little, but he was lost before he began. When those discoloured teeth were set and those sharp eyes fixed his own hesitating glance, he quavered and gave in. All he could do was to finger his third-class ticket to Zurich in his pocket. Whatever he did he must get to Zurich! Money or no money, that was all that mattered. The cab was there! He paid his bill, shook hands (he trusted for the last time) with the Lowenthal, and departed.

Once more he was in that now so familiar station. The train was on time this morning. Only twenty minutes. He tried to find a porter. He screamed "*Trager! Trager!*" He stood there with his bags, anxiously scanning the horizon. No sign of a porter, and to-day what a mob of people! They were pouring up the steps and then frothing, bubbling, boiling in the long passage before the gates. *Trager! Trager!* No sign at all of any porter. Ah! there was one! No, he passed with haughty indifference. Another! He shakes his head.

Meanwhile time was passing, so, shouldering perforce his two bags himself, he pushed towards the gate. What a multitude after that involved him! Men, women, children, and dogs all shouting, screaming, crying, all with that strange wild air of animals suddenly released from their cage and speeding to devour their food. In one fashion or

another he showed his ticket at the gate and was carried along towards the train.

His arms ached with his bags, his hat was pushed on one side, perspiration flowed onto his nose, hung there, and then drip, drip, drip. . . . People shoved, jostled, shoved, and collided. There was the train, but how horrible a sight! It was already packed with human bodies, packed to suffocation! They were piled at all the windows and at the doors seemed to stand eight deep one upon the other.

There were, you see (cursed be the French), so few trains now, and this was the holiday time and . . . But a mania seized Percy. Catch that train he would, catch that train he must. Crying aloud, dragging his bags with him, he moved forward. He was caught into a whirl of human bodies—human chests and thighs, arms and legs, noses and eyes, shirts and trousers. He fought, using his bags as weapons, crying aloud in English, having before his eyes always that dreadful woman in the black silk dress with the creaking bosom and the dirty hands. He pushed, he cried, he fought. Now he was almost at the train.

He had one foot on the lowest step. Dropping a bag, he pulled at the door. Above the door jeering faces looked down upon him. Someone tugged at him from behind. He turned savagely, bent to pick up his bag, fought towards the train once more, the train was moving, the train was moving! With others he ran towards it, crying out, waving his hands. The train moved faster. Oh! it couldn't be that he was going to miss it, it couldn't be!

He ran a little way farther, then as the train vanished into the black mouth of the station, turned round, sat down on his bag, and burst into tears.

VIII

It was now, as I see it, that he committed his crowning mistake. When he had recovered a little after poking with his pocket handkerchief at his eyes and nose, he found that he had lost his ticket. He looked everywhere; he had lost it in the crowded confusion. This completed his subjection. He seemed now to be fighting against some strange hostile power mightier than he. The power was perhaps the station —this horrible shining, gleaming, naked station. Consigning his luggage once more to the cloakroom he left the station. Then was his mistake. At all costs he should have bought instantly another ticket for Zurich and departed that evening, penniless though now he would be.

But he felt, I imagine, after that dreadful twenty minutes, that he must have breathing space. He was aching all over, aching mentally, morally, spiritually, physically. He must have a night's rest. He returned to the house in Jakobusstrasse.

She received him, he was compelled to admit, in a friendly spirit. She seemed delighted to see him, and so was Herr Klopstock. They did not humiliate him by surprise or commiseration. They quite understood his return. It was perfectly natural.

He stayed there weakly for four days in a sort of trance, sleeping, eating his food, and dreading more and more the approach of the Lowenthal. Then, on one sun-shining, air-blowing morning, he suddenly awoke to his condition. He leapt out of bed, pulled off his pajamas, plunged his head into cold water. He must leave that day . . . HE MUST LEAVE THAT DAY . . . HE MUST. Straight through his brain stabbed the thought: First there will be the bill for these

four days. The bill which, if it were anything at all like the last bill, would swallow up more than all he had. And then his ticket? He looked at his money, counting it with trembling anxiety. The exchange had altered in the last four days. His money was worth exactly half what it *had* been worth. Enough for his ticket—third class. For his bill *and* his ticket? No.

It was then that he determined on an action disgraceful for a Slumber, yet more disgraceful for an Alderness, abominable for a Beaminster. He determined on flight, and flight without payment.

He made his plans with a miraculous cunning, miraculous, that is, for one who was entirely virgin to such plans. On the following afternoon Frau Lowenthal walked into the woods with Herr Klopstock that they might take coffee together. Percy, with his two bags, crept in a cab to the station, paid the cabman, left the bags in their now familiar home, bought his third-class ticket, and returned to the house in Jakobusstrasse, penniless.

On the next morning—a lovely day—at quarter to eight in the morning, he crept downstairs, suffered an agony of apprehension in the stifling and spider-haunted passage, and slipped out and away. Half an hour later he was yet once again greeting those broad and shining steps. No mistake this time! He abstracted his bags, marched through the gate (the crowd to-day was but small), found a pleasant third-class corner, and then, his ticket clutched in his hot hand, with thumping heart he waited.

The time advanced. Half an hour, twenty minutes, quarter of an hour. . . . The carriage filled. All pleasant smiling people. They talked to him. He nodded, smiling back. Five minutes.

The door was darkened.

With the struggling agony of the entrapped rabbit, with the mute and desperate despair of the explorer surrounded by cannibals, with the dumb and devastating terror of the bird at the tomcat's mercy—he saw Frau Lowenthal staring down upon him.

She spoke to him quietly, in her so curiously accented voice:

"Herr Slumber, you have wished to escape without payment. I have with me my bill. Pay it, please."

"I cannot!" he murmured.

"Well, then—the police——"

He rose quietly and went with her.

IX

They drove back silently in a cab. In the dingy, faded sitting room, beneath the swollen eyelids of Hindenburg and the supercilious eyebrows of Ludendorff, they faced one another.

Suddenly Frau Lowenthal flung her arms about her lodger. She sobbed heavily upon his flagging chest.

"Had I known—that I should have ill-treated you so, you whom I adore."

Percy's nostrils were filled with the bitterness of faded silk. He murmured something. Over his shoulder he saw the door open. Herr Klopstock stood there. He saw, he smiled, his round face was a pool of welcoming laughter.

"*Ach! Ach!*" he cried like a happy duck.

A moment, and he was congratulating them both.

Later Frau Lowenthal went to the window and removed the advertisement for lodgers.

"You see, my darling Percy, now—with your regular

income—and the exchange—we shall not need to take lodgers any more."

Dimly, peering above the waters of misery that engulfed him, Percy wondered whether the pronoun included in its decisive plural Herr Klopstock or himself.

BACHELORS

I

IN ANY cathedral town there must of necessity be certain characters who are bound and tied to the cobblestones of the place from whose heart they have sprung. One can picture them in no other town or country—they are that place's property as surely as are the Town Hall, the Baths, the Market Place, and the Cathedral. Their very peculiarities, their little idiosyncrasies, are proudly suggested in that column of the local newspaper headed, "Are You Aware That——?" and, always, their names are to be found after "Among those present were——" when any kind of festivity, civic or personal, has occurred.

The cathedral town of Polchester in Glebeshire boasted Henry and Robert Chandler, Esqs., among their most distinguished "features." "Features" they were, and no visitor could spend a week in that pleasant city without having them pointed out to him, just as he had already been directed towards the great west-end window of the cathedral or the magnificent golden tomb of the Dryden St. Pomfrets.

Harry and Robin Chandler had spent all their days enclosed by the pleasant shelter of Polchester. They had indeed gone first to Rugby, and afterwards to Trinity, Cambridge, but from these places they had always returned to Polchester with such precipitation and eagerness

that it was evident that, even while their bodies were being harassed and driven in wilder places, their souls were resting in Polchester.

Robin Chandler was, at the time of this crisis in his history, fifty-five years of age, Harry ten years younger, and they lived at the corner of the Close in a house shaped like a teapot, and had a motherly and rotund widow as their housekeeper. Of the two, Robin was most certainly the "character." He *looked* a "character." He was precisely the kind of old gentleman whom you would expect to find in the close of an English cathedral. You would say, on seeing Robin Chandler, "Ah! *there* he is!" and you would connect him with the other old gentlemen and the other old maids whom you had, in your time, met in cathedral cities. Robin looked more than his age, because his hair was white and his figure rotund. His face was round and amiable, and a little foolish, and this foolishness was to be attributed to the fact that he was never sure what he would do with his mouth. He would be amused and would laugh heartily, but even in the climax of the laugh his mouth would wander a little, and tremble uncertainly at the corners. He had a dimple in each cheek, and a fine high forehead from which his hair was brushed straight back into a kind of white waterfall that tumbled down the back of his head. He was short and fat and very neat, being dressed generally in pepper-and-salt trousers, a brown velvet waistcoat with brass buttons, a black coat and a black tie. When out-of-doors he wore a soft black hat cocked jauntily over one ear, and he always trotted along moving his feet very slightly one in front of the other. He stopped a thousand times during his walk down the High Street, greeting his friends (he had no enemies in the world)

and he always had a number of gentle, queer things to say—things that no one else would have thought of saying. His interests were natural history, stamps, bowls, and, of course, his brother—and this last swallowed up the others even as the serpent in the Bible swallowed up all the other serpents.

Henry Chandler was of quite another kind: of middle height, red-faced, short brown moustache, brown hair cut close to his head, his eyes confident and unintelligent, his attitude that of a man who knows his world, takes many baths, and has no doubts about anything. He stood at the head of the sporting interests of Polchester, being president of the golf club and the cricket club; his interests were also apparently political, for he was a most important member of the Conservative Club that had its palatial apartments halfway down the High Street. He might be seen any morning of the week striding along in a tweed jacket and large and balloonlike knickerbockers, his face very red, his eyes very wide and staring, his air that of a man who knows his power and values it. "Ha, Benson," he would say, or "Ha, Rawlings!" or even "Good-day to you Bumpus!" and sometimes when a local infant threatened his progress, "Out of the way, little one, out of the way!"

People said, with considerable truth, that it was strange that two brothers who were so continually together should be so different, but when one knew Robin Chandler intimately one discovered that he had been endeavouring all his days to acquire some of his brother's habits and characteristics. He would try at times to be domineering, hearty, and monosyllabic, and of course he always failed. He had the pleasantest of voices, but it was the voice of an amiable

canary, and he never could express himself without using a great number of words. That Robin worshipped his brother was one of the items of natural history treasured by the city of Polchester.

He had worshipped from that day, so many years ago, when, a lonely little boy of ten, he had been informed that he was henceforth to have a companion in life.

He had been always from the first a submissive character who depended very much on other people's affection for happiness. It had been, the ladies of Polchester always said, a shamefully one-sided affair.

Harry Chandler's attitude to his brother was one of indulgent tolerance. "Dear old fellow," he would call him. "He's an odd kind of chap, my brother," he would confide to a listening friend. "You'd never think we were brothers, now, would you? You should just see him try to play golf. Stands there with his legs apart, his body stiff as a rod, biting his lips, don't you know—serious as anything—and then he clean misses it, you know. He's a dear old fellow, but, between you and me, a bit of an old woman."

Robin was quite aware of his brother's attitude, but, indeed, no other seemed possible. He had watched, with wide-eyed wonder, his brother's growth. The things Harry could do! Was there anyone who played games with such confidence, anyone who could hold his own in a gathering of men with such assurance and success, anyone so fascinating in a drawing room, anyone in the world with such captivating savoir-faire? Robin himself was afraid of women, except very old and lonely ones. He had, long ago, been "horribly" in love, and she might, one imagines, have loved him in return had he pursued the matter; but—what *would* Harry do without him? No, until Harry himself

married, Robin must send the other sex to limbo. And through all these years what agitations there had been! For a long time it had seemed as certain that Harry would marry as that night must follow day. That his brother was fascinating to women Robin held as surely as that he himself had no attraction for them whatever! Terrible hours! Terrible apparitions of beautiful young women to whom Harry would give their first golfing lesson! Terrible "alarums and excursions"! "Oh! I hear, Mr. Chandler, that we are to congratulate your brother! . . ." Is not Polchester a cathedral city?

And yet, always, Robin was delivered. Through all these years Harry had not been even engaged. Robin wondered at the women, but, from his heart, was grateful to them, and, with every year, the assurance of safety grew. Now always he put the terrible thought from him. Sometimes in the night it would leap out from the dark with mouth a-grin and widespread claws. "What'll you do, my friend, if it *does* happen? It may, you know. Plenty of time yet. . . . A nice kind of time you'll have alone. . . ." Well, that was a bad half hour, but at the end of it the grinning beast was driven back to its lair.

There was nothing that Harry could do that did not interest Robin, and this, men at the Club said, was bad for Harry.

"Really, Chandler's getting a bit of a bore. Thinks the least little thing he's done ought to be sent up to the *Times*. All that silly old brother of his."

But they liked "the silly old brother"—liked him, were the truth known, better than Harry. Robin would have been immensely surprised at his popularity had he ever known it.

There came an afternoon. It was half-past four on a day of late October, and the cathedral bells were drowsily ringing for evensong. Robin was standing at the window of the little smoking room where they always had tea, waiting his brother's return from golf. It was dusk, and at the farther end of the Close, above an ivy-covered wall, low between two old Georgian houses, the blue evening sky, fading into palest saffron, showed. The cobbles had caught the evening light, and figures—two old ladies, a canon, an old gentleman in a Bath chair—were moving, like notes in a piece of music, across the grass square to the cathedral doors. It was a sight that Robin had seen year after year from that same window, and it had always for him drama as intense as anything that Napoleon or Wellington can have felt from the top of some smoke-clad hill. "There's Miss Barton. I thought she was in London. I wonder whether her brother's left her anything in his will. There's Prendergast. It's his month, I suppose. How cross it will make him having to come in from his golf!"

He was conscious, as he heard the bells, of the quiet cozy little room behind him filled with dusty old things that belonged to every period of his experiences—old college photographs, old books, old caps that his brother had worn in different teams, which his presence had honoured. There, too, the kettle was humming, the tea cake was hot, the clock—the same old gold clock—ticked the minutes away. He ruffled his hair with his hand until he looked more than ever like an amiable, well-fed bird. The bells had fallen to a slow monotone—"Hurry up—hurry up—hurry up—hurry up." . . . There were steps on the cobbles, a key in the door, a pause in the hall, then his brother had come in.

"Fancy, Harry," said Robin, moving towards the tea things, "Miss Brandon's back. I wonder whether——"

"I say, old man," Harry's voice was, for perhaps the first time in his life, nervous and hesitating, "Robin, old boy—hem! You must congratulate me—hem—yes—ha!—I'm engaged to Miss Pinsent. She—hum—accepted me on the—hum—golf course this afternoon."

II

There followed then for Robin Chandler the most terrible weeks, weeks far more terrible than anything he had ever imagined possible for human courage to support.

It was demanded of him, on every side, that he should be false. He must be false to his brother; he must pretend to him that he was glad and happy that this had occurred; he must be false to all the old women of Polchester who crowded about him eagerly watching for any sign of that wound which, they were assured among themselves, his brother's engagement must have dealt him; above all, he must be false to the girl, Iris Pinsent, who instantly demanded his affection, and (such was always her attitude to the other sex) protection from the roughness of the world.

Iris Pinsent—golden, fragile, and appealing—was straight from the schoolroom. Her father had, six months before, arrived at Polchester as governor of its prison, and, during those six months, Iris had put up her hair and "come out." She had seemed to Robin so entirely of the schoolroom that he had never, for the wildest instant, considered her as a possible wife for anybody. Now, every day she appeared, ran over their old teapot house as though it were her own, won the instant and undying hatred of Mrs. Rumbold, the housekeeper, sat upon Harry's knee, pulled

Harry's hair, untied his tie and tied it up again, laughed and sang and danced about the two elderly men as though they were puppies quite new to a brilliant world.

No one—not Robin himself—had any conception of the depths of Robin's suffering. "Mr. Robert Chandler *must* be feeling his brother's engagement," said one old lady to another old lady, and *another* old lady to *another* old lady. "But really you wouldn't think so to look at him. He'll feel it after the marriage, though, when he's all alone"—and the old ladies either licked their lips or wiped their eyes, according to their characters.

To Robin it was exactly as though he were standing on the very edge of a slimy and bottomless pit. Towards this pit his feet were slipping, and soon, very soon, the inevitable moment of descent would come; but meanwhile, gripping with his feet, digging his hands into the slime, he would hold on as long as he could . . . the world should not know until it must.

He trotted about the town, went to tea parties, played bowls, was as neat and as careful, as interested in his neighbours' affairs, as kind and thoughtful as ever he had been. Harry Chandler, who was, of course, not a discerning man, was hurt at this indifference.

"Really, Robin," he said one evening when they were alone, "I don't believe you'll mind it a bit when I am gone."

Robin paused, then said, "Of course, Harry, I shall miss you—terribly," and that was all.

Robin, in fact, ran from his despair. There were horrible moments when it caught him up, and then there was a grinding cold at his heart; but these moments with all the force of his character he beat down. But what was he to

do? What should he, could he, do? He had devoted his life, every moment and thought of it, to his brother's interests. He could not now, at his age, build up other gods, worship at other shrines. His bowls, his stamps—he laughed aloud when he thought of them. His life had been simply that he should watch his brother's triumphs, soften his brother's defeats, listen to his brother's ideas, anticipate his brother's wants. This may seem to many a humiliating rôle for a man; Robin Chandler did not feel it so; he was simply grateful that he had so splendid a person as his brother to play shadow to. He fancied that many people in the town thought him a lucky fellow.

No longer, even now, was there any need of him as audience, no longer was his opinion invited, no longer his praise demanded—and yet even in these early weeks of the engagement, Robin fancied that Miss Pinsent was not proving quite so good a listener as she might. Indeed, he began to wonder whether Miss Pinsent liked being a listener at all. She had so much to say, so many of her own achievements and triumphs to recount. Robin, as he watched the two of them together, wondered at first how anyone *could* treat his brother with such casual equality; then, as the days passed and this became a common sight, he wondered whether there had not been something a little absurd about his own attitude.

Very reluctantly and only after a very considerable time Robin was compelled to confess to himself that Harry was not quite at his best as a lover. Harry, while Miss Pinsent sprang around him, laughed at him, mocked him, imitated him, burlesqued him, was often at a loss. He had found at once that his heavy authoritative manner had no effect upon Miss Pinsent.

"Ha!—hum——" she would imitate him. "How d'y'do, Rawlings."

Robin, listening in amazement, wondered whether there could be any love in Miss Pinsent's heart, but apparently love there was, of a kittenish, puppyish kind. Another astonishing thing was that Miss Pinsent was, it seemed, more afraid of Robin than of Harry. She was only on the rarest occasions "kittenish" with Robin, but would stand in front of him and ask him serious questions about Life and Bowls and Birds' Eggs, and Robin would ruffle his hair and answer her to the best of his ability. Really, Robin was forced to confess to himself, poor Harry looked quite foolish and even silly on many occasions. "Why does he let her behave like that?" he thought. "I do hope other people don't notice it."

He was pleasantly aware—if anything could be pleasant at this terrible time—that he was acquiring now an independent existence in people's eyes. This had begun, of course, with people being sorry for him, but that the proud little man would not allow for a moment. He had been for many, many years overshadowed by his brother; but now that his brother was allotted and disposed of, Robin Chandler stood out all by himself. "Poor little Mr. Chandler!" the ladies said. "We must show him a little kindness just now." And Robin was obliged to confess that he liked it. Nevertheless, it must not be supposed that, during all this time, he was not an utterly miserable man.

Then, as the weeks passed, his discomfort grew. He wished, how fervently, that his brother would deal with the girl in some more dignified and satisfactory fashion. "Why, even I," Robin thought to himself, "have more

influence over her than he has. She never plays about with me like that. Really, Harry——"

But the tragic side of it all was that Harry was not a happy lover. Why was he a lover at all if not a happy one? All Harry's fine spirit had departed. His honest brow wore a puzzled look that never in all its forty-five years it had worn before. He began sentences, "I wonder whether——" "Do you think, Robin——" and then never finished them. He abandoned the Conservative Club, and, although he played golf with Miss Pinsent on most afternoons of the week, the beloved game seemed to have lost most of its charm.

He no longer on his return would proclaim to his brother that he had done a bogey five in three, or beaten old Major Waggett (his especial foe) by two up and three to play. No, he returned and drank his tea in silence. Robin's heart ached for him.

Once the two of them had, in Robin's presence, a most horrible quarrel. They were all having tea together in the little dusty smoking room, and Miss Pinsent, striking unexpectedly her lover in the chest (one of her loving, playful tricks) upset his tea. He swore then with a frank volubility that spoke of many weeks' difficult restraint. She cried, rushed from the room and the house, vowing that she would never return. . . .

But, of course, she did return, and that very shortly afterwards. There was a reconciliation—but Robin found, to his exceeding surprise, that he was rather ashamed of both of them. "I wish—I wish," he thought, "that I didn't see Harry like this. Love affects people very strangely."

Then, on an afternoon of pouring rain, Robin Chandler was beating his way up the High Street, hastening home to warmth and tea. He was sheltered by an enormous umbrella, and this gave him precisely the appearance of a walking mushroom. His arm was touched and, turning round, he saw Miss Pinsent, who was looking bedraggled and unhappy, without any umbrella at all

"I didn't know it was going to rain. It looked so fine." Her voice trembled, and she betrayed the imminence of tears—she took his arm and they walked along together. Then, suddenly, he was aware that she was talking about Harry and speaking as though she needed Robin's advice about him. Robin's heart began to beat fast. "Did he really think that Harry loved her? . . . Would Harry really be kind to her? . . . Of course she was very fond of him, but . . . Did he think that differences in ages *really* made much trouble afterwards? . . . Of course she was very fond . . ."

This may be definitely put down as the most critical moment in all Mr. Robin Chandler's long life. The Tempter, with that bewildering precipitance and complete disregard for the justice of a forewarning prelude that he inevitably betrays, sprang, there and then in the dripping High Street of Polchester, upon the poor little man.

Robin saw, with a horrible distinctness, that the power was given him to sway Miss Pinsent. A little hesitation on his part, an unexpressed but nevertheless definite agreement with her as to the danger of unequal ages in marriage, a hint or two as to possible harshness and brutalities in Harry's character—he saw with amazing and horrible clearness, that these things would be quite enough. By

to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Harry Chandler would no longer be engaged to Miss Iris Pinsent. . . .

They halted for an instant at the top of the High Street. The wind was rushing round the corner, and the rain lashed the umbrella. Robin could see the wall of the cathedral, very gray and grim, and one corner of the Close with the rain running in little driven lines across the cobbles.

"You'll have your brother back again. . . . You won't be a lonely, lonely old man. . . ."

Then, with a shake of his shoulders, the thing was gone and, as they drove their way into the Close, he began eagerly, exhaustively, almost breathlessly, to prove to her that his brother was indeed a god among men.

III

It was arranged that Harry should go and stay with the Pinsents for a week in a house that they had in the country some miles from Polchester, and that during that time the date of the wedding should be settled. Robin saw with confused feelings his brother's departure; it was the first time for many years that they had been separated—this was melancholy enough—but also he was compelled to admit that it was a relief to him that, for a week at any rate, he would not be forced to watch his brother under such conditions. He found, indeed, that in a resigned, rather dejected kind of fashion he was quite happy. Mrs. Rumbold, the housekeeper, could not make enough fuss of him. Harry had always been so emphatically the master in the house that she had never considered Mr. Robert. It had always been Harry who had arranged the hours of meals, and did he in the summer come in very late, well, then, Mr. Robert waited. But now——! No, Mr. Harry

had acted as a selfish and inconsiderate man, leaving poor Mr. Robert all alone "without a thought." What did an old thing of his age want to do with marriage—choosing, so young a girl too—almost indecent! Had Miss Pinsent treated Mrs. Rumbold with care and deference, then there might have been another opinion altogether. As it was, "She's a regular young Slap-in-the-face, if you ask me," said Mrs. Rumbold to her chosen friends. "Slap and come again, that's what *she* is. You mark my words."

Therefore Robin received an attention, a deference, that had never been his before. And not only from Mrs. Rumbold! The whole town offered it him. The town had always been fond of him, but so modest and retiring had he been that the comment always was, "Mr. Robert Chandler? . . . Oh, yes! . . . Such a nice little man. No one sees very much of him. No one *knows* him, you might say, but you couldn't help liking him!"

But, during this week, in what an amazing way did he expand, flourish, blossom! It was at first incredible to him that people should be interested in him for himself, and fifty-five years' convictions about life are difficult things to shake. But behold! Whereas before it had been, "Oh, Mr. Chandler, your brother has so kindly promised to dine with us on Thursday night, I wonder whether you could come too?" now it was, "Do come and dine, Mr. Chandler, *any* night as long as you give us a day or two's notice." People found him indeed a great deal more amusing by himself than he had been before in his brother's company. Always there had been that anxious glance in his brother's direction to see whether everything were well, always that modest hesitation about giving any opinion at all while his brother was present. Now he would sit perched on the

edge of a sofa, his hands on his fat little knees, the dimples dancing in his cheeks, his hair on end, his chuckle (a chuckle entirely his own) over some joke that he saw ahead of him and would very shortly deliver to his audience. By the end of the week he had decided that:

(1) He liked women after all.
(2) He would be perfectly wretched alone, but that he would bear up as well as he could.
(3) He'd really no idea that he'd got so much to say.
(4) He felt younger than he had ever done before.

"Still," he said to himself, "dear old Harry's marriage will be too dreadful. I simply don't know what I shall do with myself."

The afternoon of Harry's return arrived. Robin stood at the window as he had done on that other horrible day when he had first heard of the engagement.

He was inevitably reminded of that day, for now again there, above the low wall, pale blue was fading into saffron, across the grass figures were stealing; already the bell was dropping into its "Hurry up—hurry up—hurry up."

Robin watched, and then suddenly, like a flame, like a fire, came the truth. He knew, yes, he knew, let him deny it as he might, that never in all his five-and-fifty years had he enjoyed a week as he had enjoyed this last one. He had tasted delights, known extravagances and excitements that had never before been his. He had been free!

He stared round bewildered. What treachery to Harry! What irony that so soon he should have changed from despair to what was not far from triumph! He remembered the bitter dismay that so short a time ago had, in this very room, wrapped him round.

But now he was a man of freedom! No one's shadow, depending upon no one in the world for his independent happiness! His eyes fell upon a picture above the fireplace, a water-colour painting of a gray fell and a blue lake at evening. It was a picture that he loved, but Harry had declared it "a dreary thing," and it was only this week that it had been raised to that place of honour. After all, Harry would not care now, now when so soon he was to have a house of his own.

The door was flung open, and Harry was there, there with him in the room.

"I say!" He closed the door behind him and came forward. "Robin, she's chucked me!"

"Oh!"

"Yes—jolly well chucked me—last night when we were alone she told me. Been mistaken . . . misjudged her feelin's—was too young . . . all the rest of it."

"Oh! Harry. . . . Oh, I'm sorry!"

Harry strode twice or thrice up and down the room. "Yes, chucked, by Jove! At first, you know, you could have knocked me down with a feather. But now—damn it—I don't know, Robin, that I'm not glad. She said it was largely some talk she'd had with you about me—how you'd praised me no end, and then she'd seen that she didn't feel about me quite like that, and that she couldn't marry me unless she did. The contrast struck her, don't you know. . . ."

He paused, then went on: "But I'm glad, dashed if I'm not. It's awful being engaged. . . . I felt it all the time really. She never said things about me as you've always done—never knew me a bit as you do. It's a relief to be free—it *is* really. I missed you like anything. You were always so

sympathetic and understanding. It'll be jolly to have you tell things to again. . . . Yes—dash it—hum—ha—won't the fellows at the club laugh? . . . Well, I must go and clean. Tell old Ma Rumbold to hurry with the tea."

He went out.

Robin waited a little, then, with the very shadow of a sigh, walked to the window. He looked out for a moment at the gathering dusk, then got a chair, climbed onto it, and carefully took down the water colour from the wall.

THE END